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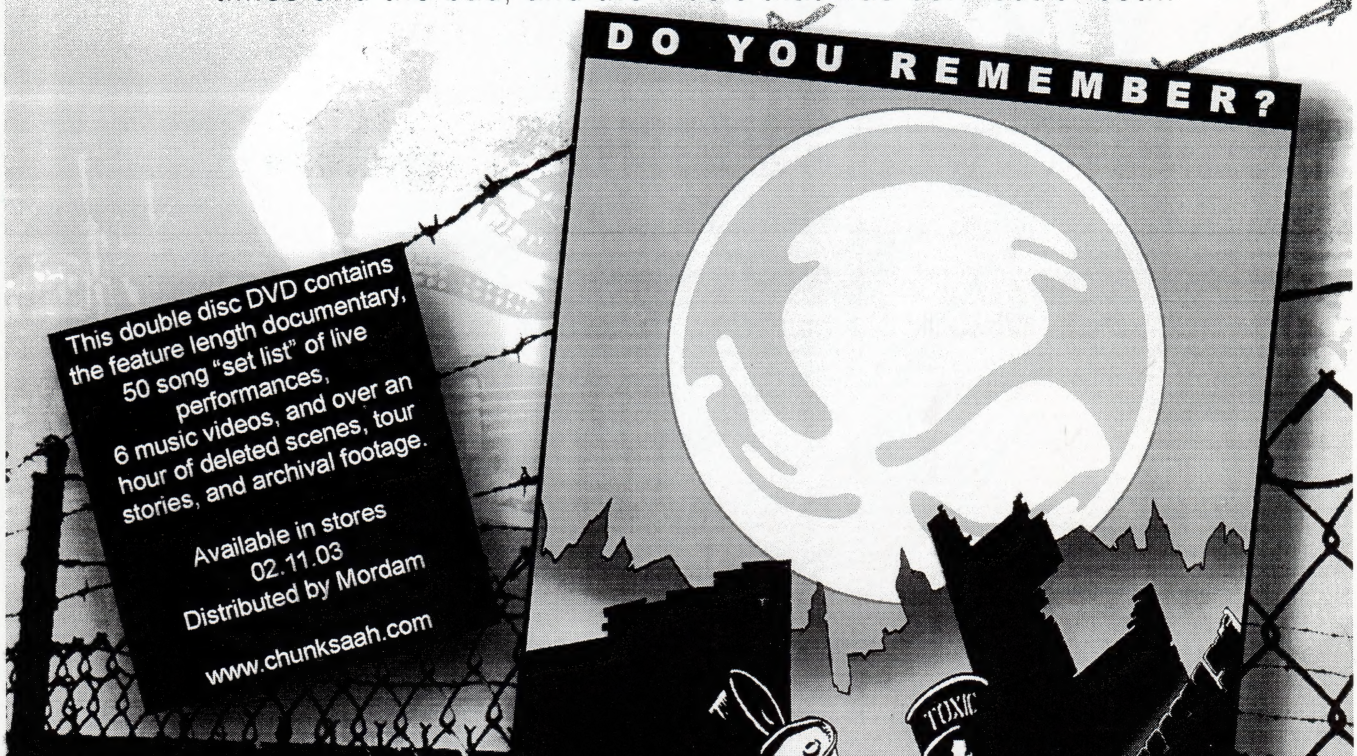

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Jersey Beat

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Editorial:

Life during wartime

"Time, time, what is time? The Swiss manufacture it, the French hoard it, Italians squander it, the Germans march to it, Americans say it's money, and the Hindus say it does not exist. Do you know what I say? I say time is a crook." - Peter Lorre to Humphrey Bogart, Beat The Devil (1953)

It's been six months since our last issue. Time is a crook indeed. It steals away our days and turns them into weeks, then months; then years, then decades. Jersey Beat turned 21 years old in April, 2003. You don't have to impress on me the irony that this fanzine is now older than a good many of its readers.

In December, 2002, a good friend of mine (and of all of punk rock) passed away. His name was Paul Decolator. Paul was engaged and planning to get married this June when he died. He was 36 years old. This issue is dedicated to his memory, his music, and his friends.

Time, time, what is time?

In October, 2002, when our last issue went to press, the drums of war were not yet beating so loudly that an American invasion of Iraq seemed inevitable. As I type this editorial, bombs are falling on Iraq. American soldiers and Iraqi citizens are dying every day. The war will last as long as it last, until the job is done, says the President. It's just a matter of time, he says.

We used to say in the Sixties that war is not good for children and other living things. Ironically, though, war is good for music. It inspires, it fuels passion, and it encourages protest. Complacency and prosperity are art's two greatest foes. No one would argue that rock 'n' roll was much better during Lyndon Johnson's presidency than Bill Clinton's. Other than a few good records from Nirvana, Generation X never lived up to its potential. Generation Y spent its youth dancing to Britney Spears and celebrating the brute stupidity of Limp Bizkit. Maybe the time has come for something better.

I look around New Jersey these days and ask, what music makes me excited? Rye Coalition makes big dumb rock that makes me feel good. That's fine. Tris McCall pens songs that celebrate the streets we live on, and elevate our friends and neighbors to the status of the archetypes in Bruce Springsteen's anthems. That, somehow, is better. Ted Leo is writing literate, inspired pop that talks about things like war and racism. That's better yet. Ted Leo and his band appeared on the Conan O'Brien show with "NO WAR" duct-taped on Ted's guitar in big letters. That's important.

Maybe it's time for the men and women (and boys and girls) in New Jersey who make music to start making statements like that again.

I'm typing these words as a president that less than half the country voted for wages a war that most of the country didn't want. And here I am spending my time writing about music, most of which will never be heard by more than a few thousand people.

Does it matter? Of course it does. Art matters. Thought matters. Music matters. We are all only given a few precious drops of time. The vast majority of human beings on this planet - certainly in this country - squander those moments; they work, they play, they consume. The few of us who choose to create — to leave something behind, whether it's a written page or a few bars of music — that matters.

To the many of you reading this who are struggling in bands or as solo performers, who find inspiration lacking and an appreciative audience hard to find, don't ever feel you're wasting your time. You've been given a gift, and you've chosen to use it. That's a precious thing in this world. It may not give you the power to start a war, but it does give you the opportunity to touch another human heart. Time, what is time? I say it's a gift.

- Jim Testa, April 2003

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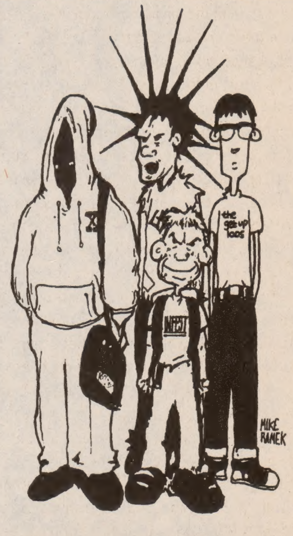

Jersey Beat

Tris McCall:

Fear And Loathing In Williamsburg

Or, why the Negatones could be your life

This process is broken. I don't think it's irretrievable or anything, but I'm also not terribly hopeful. Ideally, the record reviewer would exist in dialogue with the musician he's writing about: He'd advance an interpretive claim, and she, in her own column, or her own medium, would respond to that claim. The writer can take a wider scope, and discuss the artist's place within the subculture, or, if he's reviewing a piece of mass entertainment, its role in the great national play of ideas. Or, if the reviewer didn't feel like exerting the effort to make interpretive or argumentative claims, he might sink to the making of comparisons: i.e., Planet Janet sounds like a cross between Sleeper and Alanis Morrissette, or between Patti Smyth's *Scandal* and a perfect South Jersey spring day.

Something silly like that doesn't give the artist much latitude for response, but at least a threadbare one is imaginable. But if the music industry encourages and frequently demands such associative judgements – the better to target-market their products – I'm afraid that the groups themselves generally ask reviewers to go one worse. They want qualitative assessments, and they want them both so they can pad their presskits and so that they can have something to show momma. And I am deeply sympathetic, both to momma, who is wondering why in hell junior is spending so much time and money recording himself making an ungodly racket, and to the very real music-business need for qualitative assessments in presskits.

I'm not a complete jerkoff; I want Planet Janet to have gotten something useful out of my attempt to engage with their project. The trouble is that qualitative assessments are stupid. Critically speaking, they're a total waste of time – they don't tell you anything other than that a particular reviewer got a bang out of a particular record on one particular day. Why anybody should care has always been beyond me, and I shake my head in speechless wonder at how and why publications like *Magnet* bother to churn out qualitative assessment after decontextualized qualitative assessment, stuffing presskits like a donut machine pumping jelly into pastries.

Then there's the unfortunate fact that qualitative assessments tend to parrot and reinforce prevailing biases and prejudices. Examine, for instance, the All-Music Guide's massive project to assign a star rating to every album ever released; a mammoth undertaking which, whatever its intention, will only serve to reinforce the hegemony of the commonly-accepted rock story. The army of fat white guys writing the reviews and making the assessments have, unsurprisingly, managed to assign four and a half stars to Professor Griff and Ms. Melodie, while damning *De La Soul Is Dead* by comparison, and have further determined that *Headhunter* by Krokus merits a better rating than Carole King's *Writer*. Multiply this deadly cocktail of ignorance and lazy conventional wisdom by tens of thousands of albums, and you begin to see the trouble with broad qualitative assessments. Ultimately, one man's opinion is dependent on the man, and the man is too often wholly dependent on the bigger man's opinion.

Of course there are always gadflies like me, nuts who follow a compass swaying to the demands of what seems to be an entirely unearthly magnetism, but that poses a problem no less knotty than that of the slavish follower of convention. That the Negatones satisfy all of my aesthetic criteria for "great" music is something I've made no bones about broadcasting, but then I've publicly advanced the same for the likes of Frankie Goes To Hollywood and Death By Chocolate, so thinking that my cheerleading alone will convince anybody to share my conviction is perhaps childish. One might also point out that as a rock enthusiast and a rock enthusiast above all else, I have the habit of wandering into places like Club Luxx, Luna Lounge and (god forbid) the Continental, and really getting down to whatever inchoate collection of hooligans have been thrown onstage by the booking agent; so by virtue of its catholic nature, there's something suspect about my taste. As a matter of fact, the Negatones themselves have made that claim on several occasions. I suspect they make it because they recognize they are a favorite, and they want all the advantages that ought to accrue to them because of their status as one. I'm with them, there, too – and as a fan first, a fan who's had the immense pleasure of being present at countless Negatones performances, my inclination is to drop any desire to write a detached, wide-scope article on them and instead rave about their virtues. See what I'm getting at? Like everybody else writing about music, despite my better judgment, I'm tugged in the direction of qualitative assessment by my own enthusiasm for the form and my desire to please the band.

So what's a rock writer to do? The industry wants associative assessments, so they can compare Group X to Nirvana, and sell it, hypothetically, to Nirvana fans still pissed off that they didn't get a follow-up to *In Utero*. Group X wants a five-star rave, so they can chuck another entry in their presskit. I loathe presskits, but my distaste isn't going to chase them away any more than my disdain for associative assessments will dispel the publicist's need to market her releases by association. To ignore these realities is to be an irresponsible reviewer.

So what happens now Death, where do I go next?
Go? People like you go nowhere..

Yet if the reviewer is slave to the publicist and the presskit, we might as well give up entirely on encouraging discourse between artists and teasing out significance and cultural meaning and go ahead and join the advertising industry. That may be satisfactory for those at *Pulse*, but it's not going to work for me. A record review might need to conform to the music-industrial requirement for qualitative and associative judgment, but it should aspire to correlative, interpretive, and sociocultural assessments as well. Let's see how that might work for the Negatones and their "Heavy" EP:

Qualitative assessment: The Negatones ROCK! Well, now you think I'm being sarcastic, but no, really, they do. This is about as good a rock band as you can possibly ask for. Their experimentation with form and integration of electronic elements are simultaneously courageous and stylish, and they have the instrumental skill to successfully harmonize their prog-rock ambitions with their very infectious sense of humor. Justin Braun is an absolute rock on bass guitar, underpinning these songs with sturdy precision, and providing a launching pad for Jun Takeshi's stratospheric leads. Jesse Wallace rolls and staggers, thundering behind the band, unpredictable as a malfunctioning wrecking ball. The songs take odd twists, pile huge and demented riffs upon a superstructure of twisted steel rhythm playing, drive through dark lyrical tunnels, arrive at secret bunkers in the heart of the city. Gigantic elastic bands of guitar snap and bend with vicious twangs, the amphetamine roar of treble suffuses J Braun's relentless yelp, the words come in a torrent, like a hard rain on a tin roof. This is rock majesty -- undeniable, royal, crazy, angry as a deposed prince, amusing as his scheming jester.

Associative assessment: If the Foo Fighters stuck their fingers in wet sockets. If McLusky added xylophone and as much fucked-up old electronic equipment they could get their hands on. If Rush had a sense of humor, if King Crimson had a sense of history, if the Police were created twenty years later and were forced to respond to grunge. If the Soft Machine got hard, if Adrian Belew got blown, if Peter Hammill got hammered, if David Byrne got burned and Talking Heads shut up and played. If Kurt Cobain met Chrissie Hynde in the back of a convenience store, and all the security cameras went dead. If William Gibson and C.J. Cherryh had a rock band. If

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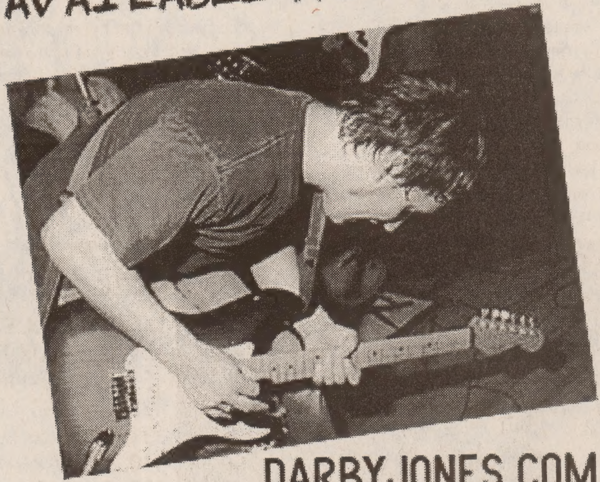

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Michael Moorcock had a rock band (other than Deep Purple, I mean). Late Batman comics, trash television, late night infomercials for indescribable products, anime, hypertext, the Tacoma-Narrows bridge.

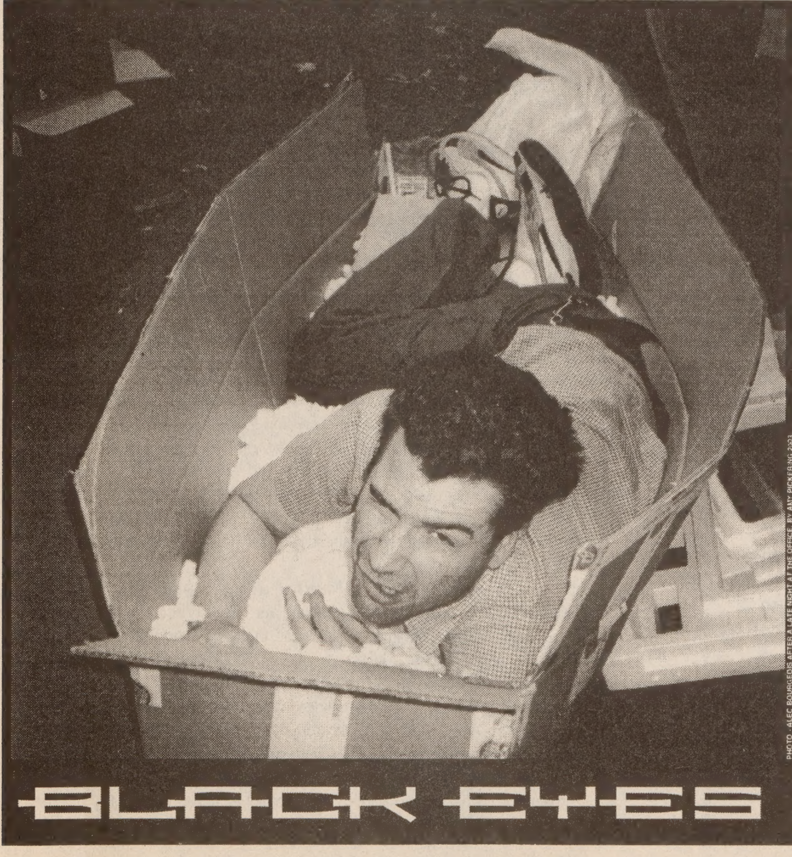
Sociocultural assessment: In a borough filled with rock bands attempting to chase money and tailor their sound to the whims of passing A&R people, the Negatones walk the edge. They do so at shows and on record, teetering on the brink of chaotic collapse, pushing pop songs to the bursting point, wildly adding elements in the teeth of the current fashion for subtraction and minimalism. And they do so at their own risk, remaining aloof, uncommercial, paranoid and self-sufficient, choice by reluctant choice. The Negatones would like to be stars. Most, in their position and with their professional ambitions, would make a few amendments to their sound; strip away some of the density to create something more inhabitable. The Braun brothers know what would help them, but refuse to compromise. These guys are from Westchester; they're working with a certain sense of entitlement. They demand that the world come to them. To the Negatones, amendment and alteration for the purposes of attracting industry attention would mean dumbing-down, and that's unacceptable. There's a perfectionism working here that's uncommon among Brooklyn artists.

"The Heavy EP" – currently the only Negatones recording available – runs a scant ten minutes; five tracks, one instrumental. This from a group with an impressive catalog, this from a group with their own operational and reputable studio. No shortage of material, only a shortage of patience and an extremely zealous editing policy. The Braun brothers would sooner throw themselves out of their own club than settle for error or padding. Every second is made to count; everything else has been scraped into the trash can. In a borough filled with ersatz egalitarians whose records are stuffed to overflow with reiterative tracks, this gang of elitists and atavists have the temerity to pare down their interaction with the public to the handful of tracks that pass the highest inspection, and to make it painfully clear they are ready and willing to pare themselves down to nonexistence if that is what's necessary to satisfy their unceasing demands for quality control. Not for nothing are they called the Negatones.

Interpretive assessment: J Braun speaks out, in the grand tradition of ironists and satirists throughout literary history, against dilettantism. He is paranoid, conspiracy-minded, and frequently defensive, but he keeps it together well enough to deliver his broadsides against feigned interest, phony engagement, and anybody he deems too tentative to take a genuine stand. "You seem to have a lot of questions for somebody who isn't looking for answers," he spits in "Thin Automation," just before the band brings the hammer down in a devastating crunch of electric guitar and carousel organ. Braun goes on to clarify: the contempt is not necessarily for the addressee's hypocrisy or even his feigned cluelessness (though surely that annoys J), but rather for his half-assed desire to open subjects he has no intention of investigating in earnest. "Tape Machines," a minute and a half outburst of hilarious venom complete with the most derisive-sounding xylophone this side of the Violent Femmes, pillories the democratization of NYC recording culture, and casts it as a metaphor for a general lowering of standards and a pandemic lack of rigor and commitment. "Everybody jumps to the extremes/everybody's got a tape machine/everybody's charging money and they think it's funny/it's exactly what it seems." Braun can countenance the sloppy product (at times); what he can't put up with is the conceit that the machine owners are treating their projects – and, by extension, the rock enterprise – with the requisite gravity when it's readily apparent to him they aren't. "Everybody does the best they could/everybody hopes it'll turn out good." When his peers are unwilling to pay close enough attention to see what, to him, is an evident absence of seriousness, he becomes frustrated, and that frustration leads inexorably to a feeling of besiegement. Possessor of one of the more fruitful Star Wars obsessions in rock, Braun turns the fate of Han Solo in *Empire Strikes Back* into a frightening metaphor for imposed stasis and betrayal. Over a monstrous riff – supplied with freakish muscularity by brother Justin – Braun spills out the story of his own alienation in the terrifying "Carbon Freeze": "When you're cash poor and under the weight/and those who could save you arrive too late/and even if you're on the lease/someone else has got the keys." Trusting no one, let down by their compatriots who are "driving down the road with no lights," the Negatones are the sound of the car careening off the highway – because nobody is at the wheel, and, struggling from the backseat, it keeps slipping out of Braun's grasping fingers.

Correlative assessment: What place does this group have in the modern Brooklyn underground; these rock and roll astronauts who reject so many of the conventions that define Williamsburg music? In a borough that wears minimalism as a badge, the Negatones revel in overdub-happy maximalism; where it is fashionable to follow MC5 and garage rock, the Braun brothers cling to their Rush records with unflinching loyalty. While slapdash record-making on fetishized analog media has become the norm, The Heavy EP sounds hyper-processed, fretted over, defiantly digital. Can they find their archetype and fit in the growing mythology of Brooklyn music? Well, if Mooney Suzuki are Arthur, powerful, direct, perhaps a little willfully slow-witted, the Negatones are Merlin, conjuring magic behind the throne, moving backward through history, arraying wit and wisdom to produce effects of astonishing force. If Oneida is Zeus, virile, commanding, hurling thunderbolts from atop the clouds, the Negatones are Hephaestus, ugly, hunted, huddled beneath a smoking mountain, forging tools of massive power, ennobled by the dignity of the workshop. (Umm... how far can I take this?) Er...if Longwave are Odin, majestic, a bit righteous, powerful but too classy to be as pugnacious as their peers, the Negatones are Loki, mischievous, caustic, phenomenally daring, fired by schemes and plans. If the Strokes are crafty Vainamoinen, the Negatones are ambivalent Kullervo, if Palomar is the brilliant, dangerous Ishtar, the Negatones are Marduk, lord of the city, its scabs and decadence, home to the creative and destructive power of ingenuity and technology. The Negatones are every mythological figure that was cast off the mountain and found power not by courtesy of the mysteries of the divine, but by twisting the implements of the built environment to purposes of which the gods never dreamed.

There, J, let's see you put that in your presskit.



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commentary:
Different Strokes for different folks

By Mishka Shubaly

Ah, my old nemesis, the Strokes.

With their recent clinching of both Spin's Editors' *and* Readers' picks for Band of the Year, the Strokes seem to have become America's Stones, champions of rock's upper crust and peons alike. The only thing worse than this latest crowning glory is the wave of unmitigated scorn it will unleash from the *truly* hip in New York whose black hearts have grown large enough to carry hatred for the Strokes, then all their imitators, then all bands with shaggy haircuts, and soon, finally, anyone with a haircut. It all seems a bit much. With less than 900,000 actual records sold, it seems like more people have written sneering articles about them than have even bought the record. I'm fucking sick of it. If anyone has a right to hate The Strokes, it's me. They showed up out of nowhere, opened up for my band, recorded with the same producer who first invited us to record with him, and got fucking famous. Meanwhile, I quit my band largely out of frustration over the whole debacle and spent an abysmal year bar-backing at Nick Marc's Tiswas party at Don Hill's, elbowing skinny guys with mop haircuts and black turtlenecks out of the way so I could clean up barf while the whole cavernous room shouted along with "Last Nite." And it's continually rubbed in my face, like the time a buddy cherry-picked this cute little NME writer I'd spent the whole evening chatting up (how was I supposed to know they were dating?). He called the next day with his condolences, offering, "We didn't even fuck, we just went back to my place and listened to The Strokes record." Indeed, for a while there, it seemed that listening to The Strokes record was the new fucking. Now they cut such a big shadow that I have to write an article defending them? Fine. 1) Please 2) Listen 3) Now, fucker: The Strokes are a good band. You should stop hating them. You should start liking them. Here's why:

It's a good record. That's really the beginning and end to my argument, and maybe I should stop there, but I won't. The history of rock and roll (this is outside of New York, where people actually outnumber stylists) is made up of good records; everything else is just dressing. It's a good record because the Strokes have a good drummer. He hits hard and he doesn't overplay and—man, oh man, is *this* revolutionary—he plays the drums as if they were a rhythm instrument, and not a lead instrument. He almost plays as if he learned how to play drums and write drum parts by listening to drum machines, not drummers. It's even more interesting when you consider that his drums are mixed like an overdriven drum machine, yet another thing which all the snarky writers bent on panning them as a Stooges rip-off would hate to consider.

It's a good record because all the songs hang together. People say the record sucks because "it all sounds the same," as if it were a legit criticism - *as if it had been a legit criticism even once in the last 25 years.* The don't realize that's exactly what their parents say about rap music, that's what their parents' parents said about rock'n'roll, that's what their parents' parents' parents said about big band and swing, that's what white colonists said about the music of indigenous people, all the way back to some guy banging on a rock with another rock and another guy digging it and some third guy, the asshole, saying "it all sounds the same." Next time you feel the need to say, "it all sounds the same," just say "I'm not listening" or "I don't understand." It's closer to the truth and it will let you shut up faster.

Maybe what people are trying to say is that the production is consistent and the songs, taken together, form a great, cohesive album that even begins to give voice to a tiny specific piece of time happening in a specific place in the lives of four young guys trying to get, well... maybe get girls and maybe get drunk and maybe get famous, but the point is, trying to get *something.* To which I'd only have to say, Amen.

While we're at it, let's put all this "American Girl" bullshit to rest. 1) "Last Nite" does not sound like "American Girl." Well, okay, maybe a little, but I didn't hear it until it was pointed out to me and I still don't hear it unless I try. One person heard it — a rock writer from *The New Yorker*— and commented on it, and then enough people read it for it to disperse through conversation. This is where you get the information about rock'n'roll you trust? I mean, nothing you read should dictate how to hear what you hear but Jesus H. Christ on ice and Mary in the penalty box, the fucking *New Yorker*? 2) Tom Petty would be the first to tell you that in rock'n'roll, originality doesn't count for shit. The Strokes didn't, but even if they had lifted one riff — but it's not even a riff, just a couple of repeated notes!!! — it's ridiculous that they're vilified for it, while Brian Wilson's halo remains untarnished after he ripped off rock's Holy Grail, "Johnny B. Goode," for "Surfin' USA," which is still a pretty fun song with its own place in the world. And let's not forget Saint George Harrison Who Could Do No Wrong who was convicted in a court of law for copyright infringement of (a.k.a. ripping off) "He's So Fine" by Ronnie Mack for his "My Sweet Lord." Again, both great songs. Holding The Strokes' artistic credibility ransom for the coincidental appearance in 'Last Nite' of one repeated note that appears in 'American Girl' makes about as much sense as the lawsuit that was brought against John Fogerty on the grounds that "The Old Man Down the Road" was ripping off Creedence Clearwater Revival. If anything, I'd be a bigger fan of The Strokes if I thought they bit from Tom Petty; it'd show that they had a deeper understanding of their own music, that they knew they could write catchy rock songs that people could use in their daily lives, washing their cars, hanging out, or just going to get groceries. It'd also prove they listened to something other than the fucking Doors.

But, at the end of the day, it's a good record and ultimately they're a good band because Julian's a great singer. For such a skinny little guy, he has a big voice, and it breaks up nicely, really smoothly (I'll ask Gordon, but I'll bet you that at least 75 percent of the grit on his voice on the recording is natural). Most importantly, in what everyone considers to be an overdetermined rock landscape where we've seen, heard, done and over-done *everything* until the world is blanched of meaning, Julian's oversized, almost operatic voice breathes life into dead words. You don't think you know what I'm talking about but you do. The line "we're gonna go/ walking through the park every day" contains nary a single good Scrabble word and even your junior high poetry teacher would be hard pressed to find anything nice to say about it.

But when Robert Plant sings it at the end of "Babe I'm Gonna Leave You," that line means *everything.* Same with Kurt Cobain's "a denial," it's crammed to the gills with a lifetime of bottomless frustration and incomprehension distilled to its essence. And the simple word "please," from the golden throat of James Brown is pure miserable sexual longing from the dawn of creation to the end of time in the entire universe, from apple blossoms calling out to bees to whales fucking in the oceans to grizzly bears, sharks, rhinoceroses, mountain goats, zebras, frogs, flies, all of us desperately needing it, and James Brown tying it all up in that one little word as if God only clove us into two unfathomable sexes and made it impossible for us to understand each other just so He could hear James Brown stretch that one little word into a spider's web, hang it between two distant stars and try to cinch them together with just that one word: "please".

Julian ain't James Brown. But you just listen to the single or any of the other fine songs on the record that I haven't bought, haven't accepted free copies of and won't allow in my house, just have a couple of drinks, get in your mom's car, throw the tape in the stereo and go for a spin around the neighborhood. He's no James Brown, but if you listen to it loud enough, when Julian slides into the chorus of "Last Nite," you can feel that word begin to flower open and you can almost make out a world contained inside of it.

Too much is made of the Casablancas fortunes. Julian insists, naively, that his pop's dough never did anything for the band, a sentiment typical of a lifelong aristocrat. Every rich person I've ever met has without fail told me "Oh, we're not rich," in guilty tones as if I could absolve them of it. What Julian means is that the money never broke out of the bank and wrote a song for him. Sure, the money's helped them; the only thing money can't help is the desire for money. Pop's money paid for the guitar, the lessons, the practice space, the demo with Gordon Raphael, and probably most importantly, the money paid for *the time* in which it all could happen. Julian is a very talented young man heading a very talented young band (all of whose parents, if pressed, I'm sure would tell you "oh, we're not rich"); his talent wasn't bought or created by his parents' wealth, the money just made it possible to expose that talent. That's not just okay, that's good and even, I'd argue, morally right. If artistic talent in this country was always matched with the capital and the situation necessary to develop it, man, what a swell place this would be.

To be fair, it is maddening to see them trying to play it both ways. You know, they're massive rock stars so they make a video, but they're indie rock so their video sucks (but it's *interestingly* sucky, to their credit), they're all really good looking, but Julian wears those retarded jackets that make it look like he has a big ass, but he still gets more pussy than God, they still play the same guitars that they did at Don Hills, but their folks' money bought them those guitars, but we said that doesn't matter, but they also still play the same *songs* that they played at Don Hill's; they're rich kids who grew up to be rich rock stars, but all kinds of other rockers have had privileged upbringing, but they brought it up in their own defense in the Spin article, but they're not rich rock stars because they haven't even sold a million records yet and everyone in the industry is still looking for the next Creed, they're doing the next record with Gordon Raphael who still works with local bands, but Fab is marrying Drew Barrymore, but now they're not doing the record with Gordon... it's so easy to get caught up trying to figure 'em out that you can forget that they're still trying to figure it out, too. I mean, I still hate them. I hate them more than I did when I started this. The Strokes opened up for my band, blew us away, and all I got was this lousy lifetime supply of sour grapes. And you can hate them, too, that's fine. But don't hate them because they suck, they don't suck at all. Hate them because they're good. Bastards.

Next Issue: How We Practiced Across the Hall from Interpol, But I Never Thought it Worth My Time to Go to One of Their Shows *or* I Always Liked Nick and Karen's Other Band Better

How Me and My Friends Humiliated The Strokes

Christ, *years* ago now, my old band played a show at Don Hill's with The Strokes. I remember going in to it pretty skeptically, because they got added on at the last second at the bequest of a promoter who couldn't shut up about the buzz they had, how they had all kinds of models at their shows, how cool they looked, etc. They didn't endear themselves to us any further by writing us an earnest e-mail about how we had listed them on our e-mail announcement as 'the Strokes' and that the 'the' in their name was always capitalized. For the record, I wanted to change it to "The Storks" on our flyers, but maybe it was for the best no one in that band listened to me...

The show was fine. The Strokes were really good; I remember them being the only band we'd played with who I actually liked. I thought they were as good as we were, and worried that they might be better. After we had finished our set, some girl came up to us at the bar and said that we'd better go and check on our stuff (still on stage, stashed behind the curtains) because some kids were messing around back there. My singer came back and reported that they weren't just messing around... which was all it took for trusty Robin Van Maarth of the doomed-even-then Candy Darlings to grab her trusty digital camera. Apparently, she just walked over to the curtain, stuck the camera behind the curtain and squeezed off a picture, then walked away and waited for the picture to come up on the screen.

When she came back, she was laughing so hard she could hardly stand up. With her random snap, she had captured the naked white ass of Nick Valensi, The Strokes' young guitar player, pumping up and down between the spread legs of someone who seemed to have enjoyed, um, the strokes.

Our next show was at Luna Lounge with none other than The Strokes and, always in the market for a catchy picture for a flyer, we used the picture of Nick's butt. (Did I mention he had some kind of weird rash coming out of his crack? We also made full color posters in which we messed with the tint of the picture to emphasize the rash. It looked like a flesh-eating virus.) We were giddy with delight at our own cleverness when we loaded in to Luna. The Strokes were all there, lounging around in the booths (yep, they did that even then,) having just completed their soundcheck. They all laughed when they saw us loading our stuff in. Except Nick, who walked right up to our singer, by far the smallest guy in our band.

"Hey, it's not cool that you guys used my ass on your flyer."

His bandmates tittered. Our singer just kind of grinned.

"I said, it's not cool that you guys used my ass on your flyer." Ah, those Strokes, they always had a way with words. Our singer was starting to look a little nervous, though; Nick was quite a bit bigger than him, and our singer, God bless him, was never known for his prowess on the battlefield. I got up from where I was sitting.

"Listen," I said, "the next time we use your ass is going to be when I put my foot up it."*

The room got really quiet. I won't lie to you, I'm a big guy. Nick was skinny, and I would have taken him apart. "If you want to fuck around, we can fuck around," I said.

"Well, man," he sniffed, "I just don't think it's really cool of you guys, okay?" He walked out of the back room, into the bar, everyone in the room—even The Strokes—cracked up.

*This is a total shamefaced lie. This part of the story is completely untrue. I only tell this version of the story when I'm really drunk or trying desperately to impress someone, which is nearly all of the time. What actually happened is I stood up and walked over and said "Hey, have a fucking sense of humor, you're the one who got laid." Nick glared at me and there was a long uneasy moment. Then he said "... Not fucking cool..." and walked back to where the rest of his band was sitting. Do I wish that I had said the other, cooler, tougher line, the line that completes the anecdote, the line that demonstrates clearly that we were cooler than The Strokes not just because of our rotten luck and our underdog status but because of our razor-sharp wits? You betcha. - Mishka

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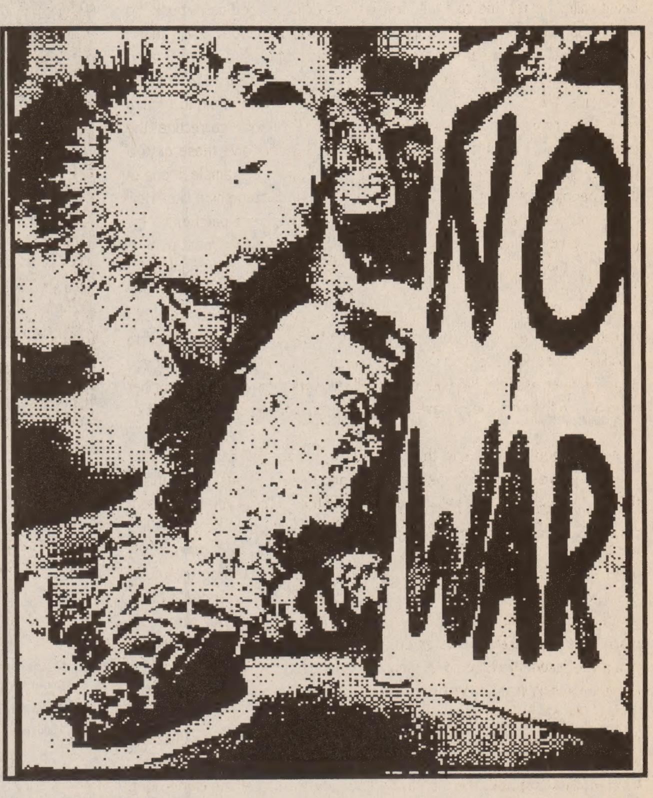
letter from prison

1,2,3,4... who's punk, what's the score?

By Brian Smith



Happy New Year everyone! Have you all made your resolutions? Best of luck to all of those that have. My resolutions this year are to be more active in the pursuit of freedom, more effective as an activist, and to encourage more people to do the same.

You could say that this issue's column is my start.

I wrote my very first column just a few months ago. I was totally stoked when it was printed and am now forever grateful to Jim Testa. When I wrote the article I was trying shed light on the problems of racism and prejudice in prison, from a punks view. I'm now happy to say that I am beginning to get responses to it.

This is exactly what I had hoped for. What I mean is I'm happy that people care about these situations. That is where everything starts, with the thought and with an interest. After that things blossom and eventually become action. What I am trying to do is spread the knowledge so that the problem can he smashed. I hope that my words will encourage others to take part.

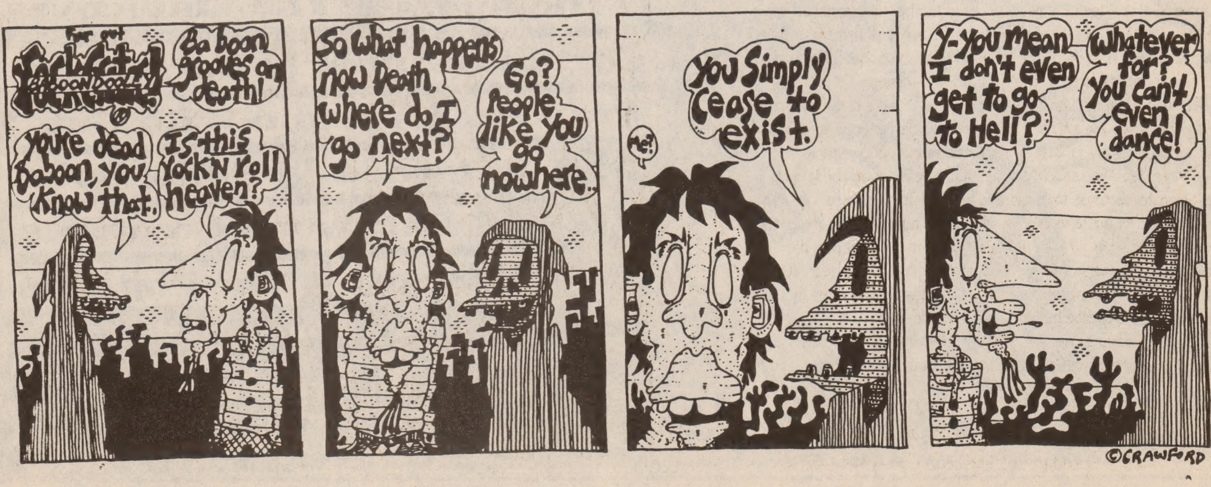
I got a letter from a friend not to long ago and he put something in perspective for me, something that I had been thinking about for quite some time. That something is that I believe that punk needs more action. Punk is a revolution, but as a whole, as a culture, there is a lot more talk about revolution then there is the act. Punk is very close to becoming the exact anti-thesis of what it is supposed to be. Punk is about unity, and is about the acceptance of individual; but more now than ever, punk is turning people away.

In a time like today where punk music is being played over the radio and all over TV, we need to focus on action. In our fight to stop the major record labels from capitalizing on the sale of punk and hardcore music, we are forgetting the importance of educating the kids coming into the scene.

I know from experience and in light of my friend's letter that I am not the only one that is noticing the lack of knowledge these newcomers have. Folks are coming into this scene because like for all of us there is something about it that they find appealing. Bu I have to wonder if they have the wrong idea. Of course I'm not implying that everyone getting into punk is clueless; no, that's not true. But a lot of these kids are seeing music videos and seeing people at shows and coming to believe that all punk is about is spiked mohawks, and leather. They have come to believe that you must have $20 worth of spikes on your jacket and green hair to be punk. They have gotten this idea from some corporate stereotype and it seems that nobody has told them otherwise. Well, comrades, I have news for all of you, they are coming faster than we did, and today more people know about punk and are spreading the word. Unless we rise up and educate these folks, then punk is in serious danger of becoming that unwanted stereotype.

If any of you are kidding yourselves, don't; we all know who I am talking about. There are bunches of titles for these guys. "Capitalist punks," "house punks," or the term that's so easy to apply, "posers." The point really isn't what we do or don't call them, it's that we must look past our dislike. Look past our dislike and check under the surface to see what the problem truly is.

I remember back about two years ago I was talking to my buddy Rabbit when he said "Damn, I can't stand all these house punks runnin' around thinking they're king-shit." I said back to him "Yeah they do get annoying but really, why do you think they act the way they do?" He answered, "I know exactly why they do it, it's because all these people are seeing punk on MTV and thinking it's hip and all popular to be punk." I said, "Okay, so they're getting this idea from TV, like punk is a trend or something but that's not the problem. They gotta learn about punk from somewhere. The problem is no one is willing to take the time to set them straight and explain to them what it's really about."


Baboon grooves on death!
You're dead Baboon, you know that.
Is this rock'n roll heaven?
So what happens now Death, where do I go next?
Go? People like you go nowhere.
You simply cease to exist.
he?
Y-you mean I don't even get to go to Hell?
Whatever for? You can't even dance!
©CRAWFORD

Like I told Rabbit, these kids are picking up the wrong idea and though we may not be at fault, we can and must do something about it.

Here are a few of my ideas:

1. The first thing that can be done to smash this whole problem is eliminate the name calling. Yeah, I know that sounds soft, but hear me out. Calling someone, a punk at that, a capitalist or aposer is juvenile and stupid. Not to mention that though you might not know it, every time that you call someone a name like this you are reinforcing your anger and dislike toward them. And in this case, that isn't gonna do anything but make the problem worse. A lot of us were in a situation at one time or another where we were being called names and cast out. Those times ultimately led us to punk. So really wouldn't it be totally anti-punk to do that to somebody else? Yeah I think it would. So if you are doing it, be punk and stop.

2. I think another thing that is vital to ending the problem is to educate these kids. We all need to take part in setting these guys straight. I mean really, we cannot expect something to change without correcting the problem. You'd think that the lyrics to the music would give these guys a hint but obviously in more cases than not, it isn't. So, for example, if one of these people come up to you at a show and mentions something like "How come you don't have a mohawk?" or "Should I have more patches on my jacket?" take that as your chance to see if the person knows what punk is about. If they don't, then explain it to them. Explain that punk is a relationship of music and activism, revolting against society's ills and injustices. Explain that this awesome culture is based on being your own individual and there should be no standards of what a punk is supposed to look like. Sure, whoever you say these things to may immediately chalk you up to being an asshole, but your words will still work their way into his or her mind and in the end, they'll have the awareness, whether they wanted it or not.

3. Another good way to end this problem or possibly eliminate the entire situation is to set up more punk workshops and related events. By far this is the most difficult of the possible steps I've mentioned but if you think about it, it really would help. There are so many things that could he set up like workshops on 'zine making, DIY work ethics and skills, and other really practical things, like starting a zine-and-record distro or setting up a food collective. Anyone can put something together like this. You could teach things from instrument making to properly growing produce. Hell, you could teach folks to fix skateboards or even how to repair bicycles. Chances are that if you asked, there would be loads of people that may want to learn how to do something that you've been doing for years. I know there are already quite a few people that are putting these things on and that's great, but it can't hurt to do another one. There are always gonna be folks that are willing to learn something new.

4. In my last proposal, the old saying "If you want something done right, then do it yourself" rings true. I can't argue the fact that it is annoying, agitating, and somewhat depressing that so many of the kids getting into punk are clueless and utterly unaware. But one definite way to get past that is to bring more people into the punk scene yourself. Tell more people about what the punk community is like and about what you've gotten out of it. Sure this might sound a bit like religious witnessing, but don't think about it like that. Just share what you know about the culture with people that you already get along with. Share the music you're into with someone you know, turn somebody onto all the great bands that are out there. I've had friends that were so into punk rock but when it came to putting people up on the good sounds, they acted snotty like someone has to be of a certain grade or on a higher level to listen to punk. It's not right to be like that; if you know a person that you think might dig punk, then share it with them and tell them what being punk is about. What can it hurt? I think none. It's bound to be helpful and will bring more educated folks to the scene.

I know everyone might not agree with my ideas and that's cool. I respect that. I just want to see the whole punk/activist scene continue to prosper and be as helpful to others as it has been to me and probably you to.

If you have other ideas, you should put them out there, let 'em be known.

If we are going to continue to grow and expand as a culture, we must continue to strive to be effective in our fight against corporate and governmental oppression. We must take the time to conquer the the problems within the scene so that we may continue to have a clear view of the world around us. We must continue to set up positive structures that will keep the scene strong and be helpful to all in our community.

Despite all other problems, we that call ourselves punks, anarchists and activists must continue to be harmonious. We cannot ever forget about unity!

You can contact me at: Brian Smith #286857, Muskegon Correctional Facility, 2400 S. Sheridan Rd., Muskegon, MI 49442-6298

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commentary

Days In The Sunny Sweatshop Hell

...when you hate your job, music can be your only escape

by Phil Pinto

Before you read any part of this, beware that I am in no way, shape, or form a racist or a prejudiced person. I know and have many friends of different races and colors. What you are about to read is nothing more than my interactions with people at my job. I included their race to better illustrate the picture for you, the reader.

Every day begins pretty much the same for me: Get up at about 5:50 or 6:00, eat a quick breakfast, get out of the house no later than 6:20, and be at my job by 6:45 or so. The bell rings at 7:00 and I am there until 3:30. I work in a sprinkler shop, building electric valves. Monday through Friday is no different from the other except for the small things, the little incidents that happen, and most importantly the people who work there. They help set each day apart from the next.

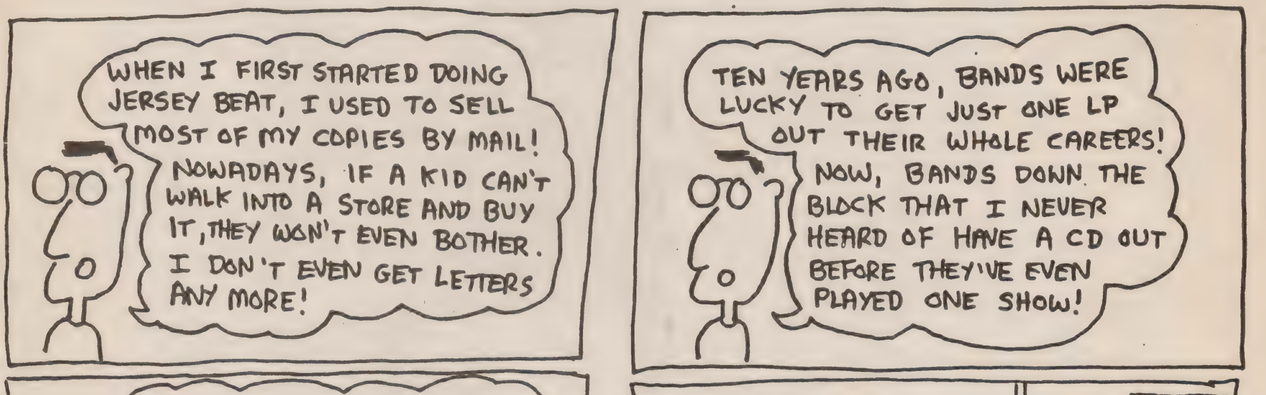
The place is pretty much what you would call a "sweatshop," except without all the harsh restrictions and regulations. There are four types of people working there: whites, blacks, Hispanics, and Haitians, and me, the Brazilian guy. So even though I see a lot of racial tension (and occasionally encounter some of my own from others), it is still very entertaining and amusing to watch all these different people working together under one roof, in a rather cluttered environment where everyone fights for their own personal space. So here go some of my own experiences, views, and thoughts on what I see and have to endure on a daily basis.

We will begin with one of the things that probably bring me the most tension throughout the day, and that is the shop radio. First of all, let me tell you that I love all types of music except for country and R&B, which I just cannot stand. So being the shop consists of three races that love R&B, as soon as I walk through the front door, I am already in my own personal hell: "You're listening to the new B106.3, playing your adult mix of old school and R&B". Fuckin' A, just what I want to hear bright and early on a Monday morning: Whitney Houston, Mariah Carey, or even Luther Vandross screaming and manipulating their voices up and down, left and right, and feeling the groove on those choruses! Is it possible to hear this for eight straight hours, please? Huh? I'm guessing here that it would be "less bad" if they didn't have to play the same ten songs over and over the whole damn day. And why is it that the songs you really hate are the ones that get played the most number of times until your ears bleed?

And if we're not enjoying the smooth sounds of the R&B hell, they will turn the dial to the adult contemporary station: "Sunny104.3, where we play the best of the 80's, 90's and today!" Oh boy, does it get any worse than this? Artists like Michael Bolton screaming "when a man loves a woman", Wilson Phillips telling me how to live my life, or Shania Twain being a little too fuckin' happy about being a woman (yeah, if I had all your money, I would be pretty fuckin' happy too, you waste!).

Every once in a great while, the shop's handyman, Chuck, will put the radio on the classic rock station and that's a huge and refreshing change. It's not my first choice, but if I have to hear music radio (which I totally hate), I can settle for some ZZ TOP, LED ZEPPELIN, and some old AEROSMITH. To top it all off, we are also not allowed to wear headphones while working. They have some moronic rule about safety and how a forklift might hit you, but if the forklifts are only in the warehouse area, and I am in the shop, how in the hell am I gonna get hit? I don't get it, and don't think I want to either. That would probably make me way too normal and uptight. . .just like THEM!

Something else they do at my job that at first I thought was a really good idea, but as always with time and the fucked up minds of human beings it all turns to crap, are the donations they collect. Suppose someone who works there has been out sick for more than three days or so, someone in the shop goes around and collects a dollar or two from everyone to give to that person. By doing this we hope to, of course, help out and show some support. Seems like a genuinely good thing to do right? Well sure, until someone starts going around collecting for Joey's uncle's cousin's dog that got ran over by a drunk driver. Give me a fuckin' break people! Look, I'm sorry the pooch croaked and all but if we are going to help everyone who knows someone that got killed or is currently ill, we might as well sign our damn checks over to them and not us!


WHEN I FIRST STARTED DOING JERSEY BEAT, I USED TO SELL MOST OF MY COPIES BY MAIL! NOWADAYS, IF A KID CAN'T WALK INTO A STORE AND BUY IT, THEY WON'T EVEN BOTHER. I DON'T EVEN GET LETTERS ANY MORE!
TEN YEARS AGO, BANDS WERE LUCKY TO GET JUST ONE LP OUT THEIR WHOLE CAREERS! NOW, BANDS DOWN THE BLOCK THAT I NEVER HEARD OF HAVE A CD OUT BEFORE THEY'VE EVEN PLAYED ONE SHOW!
IF YOU SAW SOMEONE WITH A BLACK FLAG T-SHIRT ON, YOU KNEW HE WAS A PUNK! THERE WEREN'T MANY OF US! TODAY, EVEN THE SECURITY GUARDS AT THE SUPERMARKET WEAR OFFSPRING T-SHIRTS!
AND ANOTHER THING...
THAT OLD GUY NEEDS MORE MEDICATION, HE'S DELERIOUS AGAIN!
YEAH, DON'T SAY "BEN WEASEL" AROUND HIM OR HE'LL GO ON FOR HOURS!
JIM TESTA IN THE OLD FOLKS HOME

My favorite part of the day, however, is when I am on break. I get a 15-minute break at 9:00 and another at 1:45, plus a 30-minute lunch at 11:30. During the first break at nine in the morning is usually when all the good stuff happens. This is when I talk to my friend Bill. Now let me give you some background on Bill, for he is quite a character himself. He's a 39-year-old man and is the grouch of the whole shop. I like talking to him for two reasons: he knows a lot about music, and I just like to hear him ranting and raving about how everything and everyone irritates him. We always have discussions about bands in the 70's and the 80's. He's dead set that the 70's had way better music than the 80's, and I am totally against that statement. I constantly tell him that "so and so" from the 80's is way better than "whoever" from the 70's, and he gets all worked up and tries to prove me wrong. This is the only time I actually don't mind being there, because I'm not working, I'm talking about my favorite subject in the world: music. He does lose me completely though when he starts carrying on and on about these Prog-rock bands he's into. Don't get me wrong, I like some Prog-rock here and there, but it almost seems like if there are no keyboards or an organ, plus a thousand guitar and bass notes per second in a band, he won't be into it. Yet he surprises me when he tells me he's into AC/DC and early MOTLEY CRUE, because let's face it, there is nothing "PROG" about those two bands at all. So when the Prog sermon begins, I instantly zone out and start thinking about something completely different and just nod my head and agree with everything he says (truthfully he could be telling me to give an elephant head, and I wouldn't have a goddamn clue). One more thing on the Bill topic, then we'll lay him to rest. He is one of those guys that always has to do all the talking, so during a conversation you're lucky if you can get a word in at all. This would not be a big issue for me if it weren't for the fact I have a bit of a stuttering problem. So not only do you have him trying to tell you everything that ever happened in his entire life, within the duration of a 15-minute break, but you also have me there stumbling to even start a sentence, let alone say anything!

It is also during this first break that I see that certain people are some serious meat-eaters. I'm chilling at my table in the breakroom with some doughnuts or a muffin, and they are at the microwave heating up polish sausages, hot dogs, steak, and my favorite in the whole wide world: FISH! Dammit, I hate fish! I hate any kind of seafood (but I eat tuna though, don't ask me how, maybe it's the tons of mayo I slap on there). So here I am in the break room, it's nine in the morning, and I'm barely awake when BAM!!! The smell of some nasty-ass fish attacks my nostrils and dominates the entire room as well. I don't think it's quite possible to put into words how much I actually hate when that happens. You would have to be there and hate seafood as much as I do.

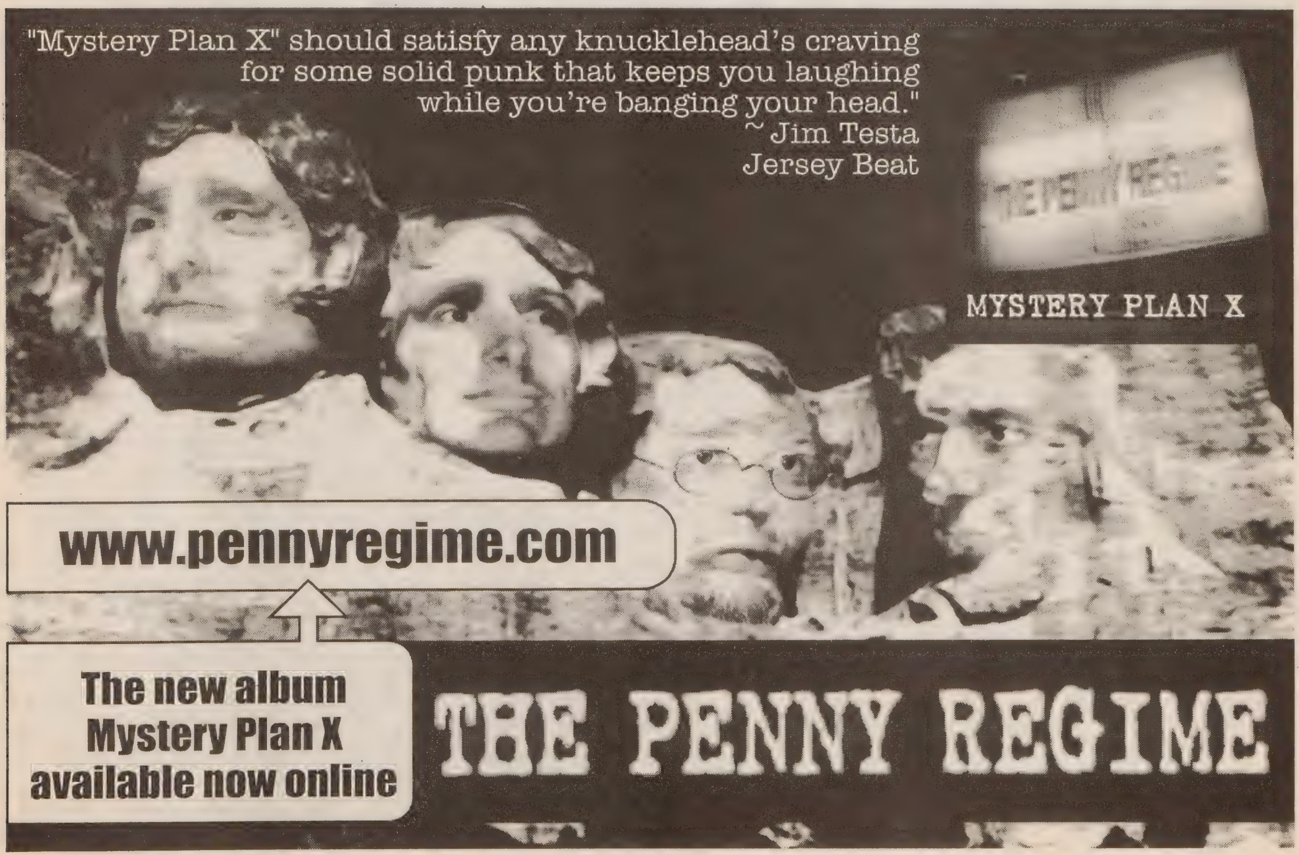
While we are on the subject of the morning break I'll throw this at you because this is when it usually happens to me. Why do people have this terrible need to try and talk to you when they know you are trying to do or go somewhere else. Let me clarify this a bit more for you. If you see that I am heading to the bathroom, why would you call me aside to engage in a conversation that is probably not that important in the first place? Let me piss, shit, or get the dingleberries out of my ass, or do whatever I have to do! You can wait pal!

Another thing I like to do while on break is read a book. Now tell me, do you really think I want to be holding a conversation with you if all I am saying is: Yup, uh-huh, sure, and right? NO! So get a clue and buzz off for fuck's sake. Look, I am not an asshole or a grouch; it's just that some people do not have any common sense, or even half a brain. So I tend to find myself in these predicaments and have to exert extreme self-control before freaking out on one of these individuals.

I don't like my job very much because of the low pay I receive, so I try to make myself feel a bit better about being there by fuckin' with my co-workers as often as possible. It's usually small, stupid shit, but I have found that gets a reaction just the same. For example, I'll be in my area doing my work (and less than three feet behind me is a line of workers, all female), and I feel the urge to let out some gas. So I'll fart and casually walk around my area back and forth, spreading my foul, putrid stench of a fart all over the place. Everyone looks at each other in disgust, but surprisingly enough, no one ever says anything or even asks who did it. They just sit there and take it all in as I laugh to myself quietly. It's a great feeling, trust me.

Another thing I like to do is freak people out by wearing obscene or offensive shirts to work. See, the majority of people who work there are older women (most of them very religious), so I often get a good rise out of them. For example, I will wear this IRON MAIDEN shirt with their mascot "Eddie" poking singer Bruce Dickinson through the stomach with this huge sword, and blood is pouring out of his mouth...oh yeah, they look at me like I am the devil's child. Or another favorite is the classic BAD RELIGION shirt with the logo on top, and the cross inside the circle with the line through it. A few people asked me what it meant, others asked me if I worshipped the devil, and some just looked like they had seen a ghost. The ultimate would have to be this homemade G.G. ALLIN shirt my friend made for me. It has a pentagram with his face on it, plus a few upside down crosses around it, and the words: 'WAR IN MY HEAD' and 'I'M YOUR ENEMY'. The best part of this shirt is the backside where the words: 'LEGALIZE MURDER' are printed in big, bold, black letters and also a tombstone that says: 'LIVE FAST, DIE, G.G. 1956-1993'. That shirt is guaranteed to offend no matter what. So these along with a few others are some of the things I do here to keep everyone on their toes, or on the edge, or just simply to entertain myself.

I believe the company must have a pre-requisite that in order for you to work out in the warehouse, you have to be weird. Man, there are some funny characters in that area. One of these characters is an older black guy named Tommy. He's as southern as they come, and his accent is heavy as balls. He can see you ten times a day but he will always say: "hey partner!" and you'll answer, and he'll say: "alright, alright!" everytime, it never fails. One day


"Mystery Plan X" should satisfy any knucklehead's craving for some solid punk that keeps you laughing while you're banging your head."
~ Jim Testa
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I saw him and he did his routine greeting, then just ten minutes later I saw him again, and he did the exact same thing. A little burnt? Too old perhaps? Or both? Your guess is as good as mine. And that's not it, the best is when he talks. He talks so goddamn fast that all the words join together forming one huge mumbled word. For example, I was talking to him the other day and he said: "I am going to get you your parts as soon as I get the forklift back", but how he said it was more like: "amon getcha parts soonasi get da fo'klift back". And all that was said in under two seconds flat. It was incredible, I stood there looking at him going: man, you have some talent there, I don't know exactly what it is, but it's there. Other times his rate of speech is so fast that I just ignore him and go back to what I was doing. I have to, it's too insane to comprehend.

All right, brace yourselves because here comes a weird one. I just went out to the warehouse to get some parts and this Spanish kid that works back there named Erik just baffled me with this series of questions he spewed at me. I'm walking around back there looking for my shit and I have on a hat with the logo and mascot from my favorite band MOTORHEAD on it. He sees me and starts walking over to say some smart remark or to call me "Satan" for wearing my old school metal shirts. Somehow today his agenda was different, he came up and said: "hey" as he looks at my hat curiously, "You like METALLICA?" with his heavy Cuban accent. I could have easily gotten into an hour long discussion on that band with him, but didn't want to engage in anyway, so I simply replied with: "I used to". And for the record, why in the hell did he look at my MOTORHEAD hat and ask me if I liked METALLICA anyway?! The thought process in some people's brains amazes me sometimes. So then he proceeds to ask me: "Do you like acid?" which again I thought was very strange. METALLICA? Acid? I don't really see the connection there. If he would have asked me about the GRATEFUL DEAD and acid or METALLICA and beer, I think it would have been more appropriate, but regardless I answered him. "I used to", and he came back with "How about Ecstasy?". Again I told him that I used to but not anymore, and this is where the conversation completely turned around. He turns to me and says with his eyes bulging out of his head: "Yeah, Ecstasy man, go to the club. Hey you go to club? Yeah, I got to club and do Ecstasy, and girls there man! Whoo, they start to dance and you get hot, yeah it's good right?". By this time I'm thinking he needs a cold shower because he is obviously a bit too far into some sort of drug-flashback fantasy of his own. So I start to casually walk away from him and say: "Right, it's good, I guess". Well, that was a hell of a way to start off my morning!

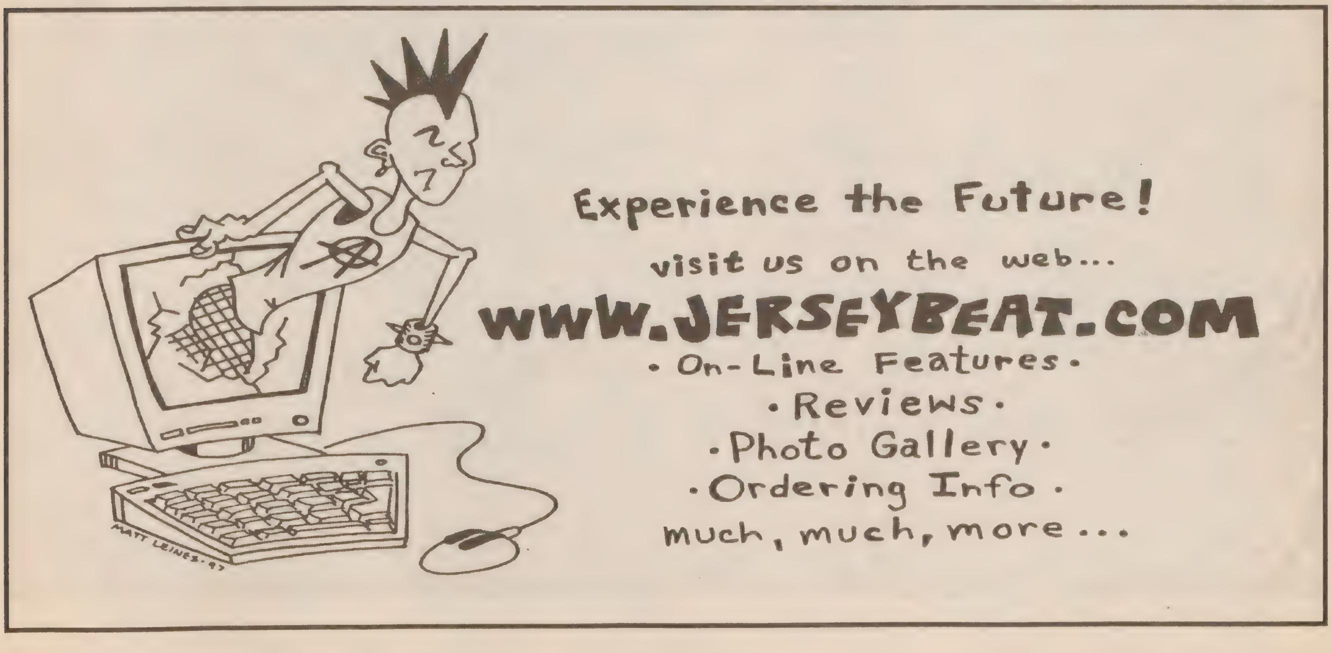
Oh man, I just got done talking to this new kid named John that seemed pretty cool until he struck a nerve with me. He had on a T-shirt that had the flag of Puerto Rico and the phrase: "100% Puerto Rican and proud" on it, so I asked him if he was born there, and he said no. Then I asked him if his parents were from there and he said yes, they both were. So me being from Brazil and speaking Portuguese, I know a little Espanol right? So I say something pretty easy to him, nothing fancy or heavy duty, and he looks at me with a very confused look in his eyes, and says: WHAT?! I repeat my question and he comes back with the same response. That's when I knew he was a douchebag. I said "nevermind" and walked away. I really hate people who wear these shirts showing off how proud they are of being from wherever they claim to be, but can't even speak the native tongue. To me that's bullshit! That's like me wearing a SLAYER shirt if I don't know any of their songs or never even heard of them. I take pride in wearing whatever shirt I happen to have on, and think more people ought to also, instead of being "poseurs" (remember that word?). Those people just seem to be trying to be cool, or down, or hip with not being from this country. That's why I was never able to comprehend that whole "I love Africa" trend that happened in the late 80's. Yeah, go ahead, go to Africa and see how you like it there and how great it really is. Please, I was born and lived in a third world country for eleven years so I know better than to be walking around here talking shit about how much better Brazil is. Sure I am proud to have been born there, and glad to have had the chance to kind of grow up there, but this country offers a much better way of living than Brazil probably ever will. So sure, be proud of where you came from, or where your parents are from and you consider yourself to be also; but at least know what you are representing, the language, some background, and don't just be a trendy dick with a shirt from some country you don't know shit about.

The following is something I wrote down one day at work just to get it off my chest, and upon reading it got the idea to do this story. "I'm sitting here assembling tops to go on the electric valves I daily build, and I'm surrounded by things bringing me great displeasure. Ahead of me I have Leroy, the shop's "playa" who seems to have dated every female in here, talking to Ernest, a Haitian guy who when speaking English must have the volume on his voice box on negative ten, but when talking in Creole, shouts louder than all hell. They are going back and forth about all the football games that will happen this weekend, today being Thursday and all, I guess they have to get all their gambling done early. This irritates me severely for I do not care one bit about sports nor anything related to it; be it gambling, statistics, whatever. And to hear this non-sense, jock crap for an hour is really aggravating.

Then right behind me I have an assembly line consisting of seven women. Four of them are from Cuba, and the others from Haiti. So now I'm sandwiched between a wall of noise I have now dubbed: "SPREOLE", which is a deadly combination of the two languages when being spoken at incredible speeds causing a foreign ear like mine to almost bleed to death. And last but not least, to my right sits Mrs. Young, an elderly black woman who probably could not a get a clue if it was being handed to her on a silver platter with a complimentary one million dollars in cash, tax free and no questions asked. Not quite her fault though I'm sure, but regardless, her lack of understanding for what is happening right under her eyes is unbelievable. This woman will sit there assembling her little pieces of whatever in the hell she does, and if anything goes wrong with her machine, or if there is a problem of any kind with the material, she will simply sit there. Then, she waits about five minutes and just looks around the shop like a drug fiend after taking his first hit of the day...totally spaced out and in her own little world. Soon thereafter, she will start shouting out to people all the way at the other end of the shop and signal them to go over there and help her. Now I know for sure she's not handicapped in any way, and she's not that old and can still walk perfectly fine. So what gives, for fuck's sake?! Then after this incredibly long and horrific scene happens and someone comes over to help her with the problem, she refuses to move out of her seat, making it completely impossible for the person helping her to get anything accomplished.

One more thing before I go back to work. Why is it that when older people talk, they always have to repeat at least three or four key words over and over again while trying to make their point? For example, "Why is this bar so far out on my machine? That's dangerous! I mean the other day I almost got hurt. That's dangerous. I was doing my job and I scraped my arm up against it... that's dangerous". Dammit woman, I think we get the point, I mean, you've only repeated it five hundred times! By the way, that was said by the one and only Mrs. Young. OK, gotta go, wish me luck. It is now 2:45, and I have 45 more minutes before I leave."

Well that about concludes this report on my job. In all honesty, the job is not as bad as I have made it out to be. It's just that somedays I am in no mood to deal with anyone's shit, and it seems like those are the days when everyone forgets their brains at home or forget to take it out of their asses. The way I see it, it is better to write about it and hope to entertain somebody in the process, than to show up to work one day with an AK-47 and unload a full clip on all my co-workers. Then again if murder was legal like G.G. ALLIN wanted, that might be kind of fun also... HA! HA! HA!



Live reviews

JERSEY JAMS BENEFIT: Hamilton Street Cafe, Bound Brook, March 22 2003

By Jim Testa

Usually when you hear the phrase "all ages show," what it really means is some mix of punk, emo, or hardcore bands playing to a lot of young people from around 14 to their early twenties. But this benefit for the Jersey Jams, Jersey Cares organization really was an all-ages affair, with little kids barely old enough to walk through moms and dads in their fifties.

The Hamilton Street Cafe show - which I organized and emceed, so this is by no mean an objective review - was part of a statewide celebration, organized by Courier-News music editor Bob Makin. The date was chosen to mark the 40th anniversary of the Beatles "Please Please Me;" at other Jersey Jams benefits held the same day, bands joined together in Beatles jams and sang "All You Need Is Love." Unfortunately, with five punk-y bands, most of them still in their 20's, you don't wind up with a musicians who play much Beatles music. So we spun Beatles anthologies in between sets over the p.a., and most of the bands did at least one Beatles cover. The spirit was there, anyway. Remember, when someone asked the Beatles back in the 60's why they didn't write anti-war songs, like a lot of the folk artists and political bands of the era, John Lennon replied, "All of our songs are against war." That was definitely the spirit of the night -- music played with the purpose of bringing people together.

The night started off with Mr. Neutron, the oldest band on the bill. Not surprisingly, they did the most Beatles covers too, including "Octopus' Garden" and "I Saw Her Standing There." Fronted by Courier-News Features Editor Damian Fanelli, the band ran through a set of originals with a bit of surf twang and power-pop punkiness. Next up were Fairmont, recently transformed into a trio with acoustic and electric guitar and drums. The new sound is softer, obviously, but the band always had an ear for melody, and some of their most noticed tracks in the past were nearly acoustic anyway, so the new format works fine. Billionaire Boys Club, formerly known as Evelyn Forever, followed with a spirited set of catchy poppy rock. This was my first chance to see them since the name change and, to be honest, they still sound an awful lot like Evelyn Forever - lot of harmonies, pop hooks, and catchiness. Some of the new songs do lean in a more "rock" direction, but they did several old E4E favorites, along with a fun sendup of "Hit Me Baby One More Time" and a Beatles medly of "Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band" and "When I'm 64." The Milwaukees proved to be the loudest and hardest band of the night, featuring songs from their new CD This Is A Stickup. The Milwaukees are a band that usually won't do covers, but tonight they threw in a psychedelic noise-fusion rendition of the Beatles' "Tomorrow Never Knows" that I'm sure had George Harrison chuckling up in heaven. The evening ended with Copperpot, another poppy band with a infectious indie-rock sound not unlike Nada Surf or Ultimate Fakebook. Frontman Jarrett had all the rockstar stage moves down and there was a line of google-eyed girls standing up next to the stage drooling through the whole set. Local artist Seth Alexander contributed a beautiful Beatles portrait painting that was raffled off to help raise funds, and the evening ended very successfully, with a profit after costs going to the Jersey Jams Fund and a nice crowd of people (including a good sampling of little kids getting their first taste of NJ indie-rock) who got to support a good cause and see a great show at the same time.

Billionaire Boys Club

Flogging Molly/Lost City Angels/The Briggs - Birch Hill Concert Hall Old Bridge, NJ 3/6/03

By Phil Rainone, Steve Rainone, & Tim Norek

Having heard good things about Lost City Angels and The Briggs, we were looking forward to this night (especially Flogging Molly). Tim had come up from Virginia Tech in the ice and snow to catch the show. Steve was surprised that the line to get in wasn't long. Because of the storm, more fans came later on, not wanting to stand in line. The Birch Hill crew was doing a good job of getting everyone in quickly on this cold night. We got there early (unusual for us), so we had time to talk and hang out. Within a half hour, the bands came on. The Briggs started out with straight out Oi! They were fun, and had a lot of energy kicking out the tunes, but the crowd wasn't getting into it for some sad reason. They tried to get them going, but all we did was listen and sing along. Despite the crowd, The Briggs cranked out some good hardcore, and sounded great! Only wish the fans were more supportive, in that the band played some very good stuff.

Lost City Angels followed. They started off with a Goth intro, then went into some good hardcore punk. The lead singer reminded Tim of a husky version of AFI's lead singer, with the dyed black hair, and similar cut. They got the crowd up, and the pit was excellent! Tim also noticed a ton of ladies skanking away in the pit, more than usual - nothing at all wrong with that! The crowd started chanting the Bouncing Soul's "Ole" chant for Flogging Molly, which was really cool. On last year's Warped Tour, Flogging Molly threw out a few choruses of "Ole," giving a nod to one of their favorite bands, so the crowd was paying homage to both bands. A few days before the show we did a phone interview with Bridget Ragan (who plays fiddle and tin whistle in Flogging Molly. She had said she started playing when she was 2 1/2, which was pretty surprising. She mentioned that it was something she just picked up on. On stage, she is the calm inside the storm. The band twirls and dances around the stage like whirling dervishes, as Bridget stands calmly with an aura of serenity around her. She said the present lineup has been together since '99, and their songs deal with themes like freedom, life, love, and always a hint of mischief. Flogging Molly walked on stage to a recording of "Danny Boy" (they were celebrating St. Patty's Day early), and after that, they proceeded to play up a storm! Tim and Steve both said the Pit was great! (Both still had sore ribs on Sunday). There was a lot of skanking, and even some Irish jigging going on-a community feeling, a real family vibe going through the club. They played crowd favorites like "Drunkin' Lullibies," "These Rare Old Times," and "Rebels of the Sacred Heart," then launched into an abbreviated chant of "Ole," then into "Selfish Man." The band has always impressed me as being extremely tight, and still being able to have fun and go absolutely nuts on stage. They encored (almost a 2 hour set) with "Sentimental Johnny," and "Devil's Dance Floor." The latter song had the whole club moshing, singing along, and having a great time! We all had a good time seeing on of the best bands out there! Steve has been playing the bands cd's since the show, and Tim said it was great to be back home, getting to see Flogging Molly crank out Irish bar tunes, ballads, and good old Oi punk. Just an awsome sound, and mix of their music!

We'd like to thank Jon Vena from Concerts East, Dana Gordon, Side One Dummy Records, & Gary S., Flogging Molly's tour manager.

Support Jersey Jams, Jersey Cares www.jerseyjamsfund.org

SXSW 2003: Once more, with feeling

Story and photos by Jim Testa

"I finally figured out what SXSW is. It's good bands playing bad shows." – Ed McNamara, Garrison

The Ankles of Jersey City would almost certainly agree with Ed McNamara, the guitarist of Boston's Garrison. After driving all the way from New Jersey to Austin, Texas, giving up a few days of work in the process and spending hundreds of dollars of their own money on food, gas, and lodging, the Ankles' South By Southwest experience consisted of an 8 p.m., Wednesday night showcase in front of a few other bands and a handful of pals from home. Garrison's set, at the same venue a few hours later, didn't go much better.

A few nights later, though, Rye Coalition – another band from Jersey City – performed the set of a lifetime, an electrifying, kick out the jams masterpiece of high-energy rock, in front of a packed throng of rabid fans. And the guys in Garrison, who stayed for the whole convention, got over their disappointing showcase and managed to have a great time - "absolutely incredible!" they reported on their website, "SXSW was a blast!" - drinking in tons of cool music along with gallons of great Texas beeer, and meeting a lot of other bands.

It all reminds me of Tom Lehrer's old line: Life is like a sewer - what you get out of it depends on what you put into it.

South By Southwest – or SXSW for short – remains the music industry's largest and most important annual event, a four day gathering that's part business convention, part music festival, and part expense-account bacchanalia. This year, 4,000 coventioneers descended on the city of Austin to hear over 1,000 different acts at 52 different venues – everything from Japanese art-rockers to Swedish garage-bands to inner-city hip-hoppers to the cream of America's indie rock underground. The variety and opportunities to find good music were overwhelming, and anyone who came back muttering that there was nothing to hear simply didn't bother to listen.

Paris Texas

Because so much of the music world – performers, writers, retailers, promoters, and labels -- particpates, SXSW has always offered an opportunity to gauge the mood of the industry. This year, with war drums beating in the background (Austin's traffic snarled to a stop on Friday for a 7,000 person anti-war march through the heart of the city) and a changing economy threatening its very existence, the music industry didn't seem to have much on its mind other than having a good time. This was the 17th annual SXSW, and my 15th consecutive trip to Austin, and this year's event reminded me of a roll-back to the conference's earliest days, when major-label bidding wars, digital download angst, and other business concerns took a back seat to the music. The actual convention even seemed a bit of a throwback, with a lot of nuts 'n' bolts panels about the basics of the music business and fewer of the quirky theme panels that proliferated in recent years. A panel on rock biographies turned into a mini-war between Jim DeRogatis (author of the recent bio of Lester Bangs) and David Ritz, who pens authorized "as-told-to" celebrity autobiographies. Derogatis all but called Ritz a hack with no journalistic principles, while Ritz smugly noted that his books make a lot more money than most rock biographies. There was surprisingly little talk – on stage or off – about the impending war in Iraq, although the Chicago Tribune's Greg Kot did chair an interesting panel that looked at political activism in rock then & now, with Vietnam protesters Wavy Gravy and the MC5's John Sinclair seated alongside modern-day activists like Jennifer Toomey and REM's Mike Mills. Superstar interviews have become a staple of the daytime panels – in the past, serving up performers like Led Zeppelin's John Paul Jones or Courtney Love for an onstage interrogation. This year, reflecting the overal downsizing through the industry perhaps, the "celebrity" was Liz Phair, who hyped her forthcoming comeback LP while unashamedly admitting that she had employed the same song-doctors that co-wrote Avril Lavigne's hits.

And then there were the shows. Despite a few clunkers – which brings us back to the poor guys in the Ankles and Garrison – almost every showcase I attended was well attended if not full. There were scores of unsigned bands vying for attention, as well as a healthy number of major label acts with recent releases looking to score a few points with the small army of rock critics who flock to SXSW every year. There seemed to be fewer big-name, "must-see" acts this year, although there were a couple that generated some buzz, like a semi-secret set by Blur (everybody who went said they sucked, including the local papers,) and sets by Supergrass, Spoon, and Yo La Tengo. For me, standing on line for an hour to see some big act that will eventually tour through NYC anyway doesn't hold much appeal or make a lot of sense when there's so much else going on; when I got shut out of the showcase by the UK's Coral, I was able to walk right into another club two blocks away and caught a killer set by Raleigh, NC's The Cherry Valence.

A contingent of former big-names showed up looking to use SXSW as a foothold for a comeback, including Joe Jackson, Blur, Liz Phair, and Camper Van Beethoven. And there was a small army of bands from New York City (a scene criminally overlooked by SXSW in years past) hoping to ride the coattails of the Strokes and stir up some major hype, including Longwave, Mooney Suzuki, Stellastarr*, the Witnesses, The Natural History, the Realistics, the French Kicks, the Rosenbergs, Pilot To Gunner, Calla, Johnny Society, the Rapture, the Fever, the Churchills, and White Light Motorcade. Ironically, the NYC band that whipped up the biggest buzz turned out to have one of the lowest profiles back home – Brooklyn's Palomar not only played a terrific, well-attended showcase and earned a rave review in the Austin Chronicle, but the band had its adventures at SXSW detailed by the local daily, the American-Statesman. And one of the most talked-about artists at the entire convention turned out to be New Jersey's Ted Leo, who performed a soldout showcase with his band The Pharmacists as well as several solo/acoustic slots.

In the end, SXSW is a lot of things: Good bands playing bad shows, overrated bands playing soldout shows, friends from home to root for, and a horde of unknown bands to discover – punk and country and metal and rap; high-school kids to grizzled gray-haired vets; rock and roll of every conceivable style, in a dozen different languages, daytime and nighttime, for four straight days. It's equal parts Mardi Gras and Spring Break, only a lot louder and, for anyone who loves to wallow in music, a lot more fun. I've been to 15 years of SXSW and this one may just have been my favorite. Here's why…

Wednesday

There are two kinds of clubs in Austin – the ones nestled either on or near Sixth Street, the main club drag, and then all the others, which are scattered through different neighborhoods in different parts of the city. The Scholz Beer Garden is a nice place – a restaurant with its own house brew and nice big backyard for bands. But it's well off the beaten path, a good

half mile from the insanity down on Sixth Street. So when I showed up at 8 p.m. to see the Ankles here, I was pretty much alone. Chris Ward from Uncle Joe's was there, but he was touring with the band. And I ran into Artie and Adam from Error Type:11, who told me that their new band Instruction was playing later that night. Otherwise, the only people in that beer garden were the waiters and bartenders or the other bands. It was a Revelation/ Blackout Records showcase, but none of those labels' marquee names were on the bill, and although it was an all-ages show (weird, considering you had to walk through the bar to get to the backyard stage), local kids aren't going to come out on a school night for a bunch of out-of-town bands they've never heard of. So the Ankles played a tepid set (they really need to work on their stage presence) to a nearly-empty venue, and I left wondering if the rest of this SXSW would be as dismal.

Actually, that first showcase turned out to be the low point of my SXSW. Everything else was butter. At Buffalo Billiards back on 6th Street, at the instigation of my old friend Howard Wuelfing, I caught Brother Eye, a bunch of guys who have been hanging around New Hope PA forever. Their brawny alt-rock reminded me of the Wallflowers with a bit of Tom Petty. Not bad, and they sure seemed to be having a good time, playing a big room to a nice-sized crowd. But things really picked up when I walked across the street to a new club called Friends for Palomar. Friends opens up onto the street with a big picture window next to the stage, so the band is practically playing on the sidewalk. The inside of Friends (a fairly small place by Austin standards) was packed and there were even more people outside, all rocking away to the bittersweet girl-powered pop and big bright smiles of Williamsburg's best-kept secret. The crowd loved them, the local newspapers loved them, I loved them -- and hey, you can read an interview with them in this issue!

And holy shit, the night just kept getting better. Right next door at another new club called Spill, where I caught Bryce Avary, a cherubic sprite from near Dallas who calls himself The Rocket Summer. I saw him quite by accident at last year's SXSW and made a point to catch him again. Bryce is 20, could pass for 16, and plays delectable bubble-pop. Last year he played solo; this year, he brought a friend and the two of them played musical chairs, switching back and forth between drums, guitar, and electric piano. Bryce even brought along a couple of confetti blowers that showered the room with brightly-colored bits of paper, a perfect metaphor for his happy poppy songs. Next up came Instruction – with Artie Shepherd from ET:11 and Tom Capone from Quicksand. This was only Instruction's third American show, but the band has already done two tours of England and has completely won over the metalheads at Kerrang! Magazine (shades of the Strokes, who cranked their buzz machine into full gear by winning the blessing of NME!) Words fail me trying to describe Instruction; they are a rock machine, loud and heavy, fronted by a singer whose power and passion is matched only by his arrogance. Now, as Artie himself admitted, Americans hate arrogance (except when we're invading another country,); so my guess is that Instruction will

SXSW
south by south
KLBJ
Lite
JIM BEAM

Top, Jon Gonnelli of Rye Coalition; bottom, the Devics from LA

have as almost as many people rooting against them as for them. But their transcendence is undeniable. I can only compare their set to what it must have been like walking into some small club in 1987 and seeing Guns N Roses for the first time (or strolling into an English pub in 1977 and confronting Def Leppard without any warning.) They ended the set with a monster anthem called "God Doesn't Care If You Blow Up The Whole Fucking World" that includes an electrifying *a cappella* falsetto vocal part – you could have heard a pin drop during it - and if I had died of a heart attack and never heard another band again right there after they finished that song, I would have gone to Heaven a happy man.

Thursday

If they stop doing SXSW and all the bands left town, I'd still probably get to Austin every couple of years just for the food. It comes in two varieties – Tex-Mex and barbecue – but both are so good that they're worth a trip to Texas. After a huge, yummy dinner, I got a bit of a late start (missed the 8 pm slot) and headed to one of Sixth Street's biggest venues, Club 505, where I hooked up with NJ's own Val Emmich. There was a big Jersey contingent there -- Childlike Records' Mike Iurato, Artist Amplification's Andy Gesner, the Saint's Scott Stamford – to watch Val and his band make their SXSW debut. His angsty rock quickly won over the crowd, which listened with spellbound attention. The editor of Guitar World magazine even asked to meet Val after the set. Another SXSW victory! NYC's Miracle of 86 were next; unfortunately, the club they were playing was not well known and right next door to Emo's, one of the most popular SXSW venues, and the place was charging an outrageous $12 door for non-SXSW locals. So Mof86 mostly played to about a dozen friends from back home, all in Austin for SXSW, including a few of the Realistics; but that didn't stop them from playing a killer set, working up a huge sweat with their mix of frantic emo-flavored punk, their newer country-fried ballads, and an earnest cover of "Born To Run" sung by guitarist Mike Robertson. Back up Sixth Street and back to Spill, where I caught old W.E. Fest friends The Waking Hours, now transplanted to Los Angeles but still playing the same infectious bubble-gum garage, with Beatlesque harmonies, Monkees-esque hooks, and that hilarious show-stopping closing cover of LL Cool J's "Momma Said Knock You Out." Knocked out I was.

Friday

About 5 or 6 years ago, Philadelphia had a cool rock scene going with bands like Trip 66 and Dandelion. Members of those two bands now play in Laguardia, whose set at Buffalo Billiards kicked off my Friday night. Laguardia play thick shoegazer rock overlayed with keyboards and sullen, low-key vocals, but crisp and energetic drumming and the occasional guitar flourish. They're not much on stage presence but I did find their set engrossing. Artie Shepherd had recommended a few English bands to me that he had seen while on tour in the UK, but The Darkness turned out to be a high-concept joke – let's bring back RATT and make believe that bad hair-metal in spandex tights was actually cool. I lasted about 10 minutes – or one costume change – and was out of there. Back to Buffalo Billiards, where I caught the second half of a set by Dallas' Deathray Davies, who played a really fun fusion of early Kinks and Who. They were followed by Columbus, Ohio's The Sun, a trio with a debut CD out on Warner Brothers playing pretty standard garage punk. I wasn't at all impressed at first, but the band's energy and high spirits especially won me over, especially when the skinny, nerdy front dude ripped his shirt off, threw his glasses away, and started going ballistic on a few really frantic garage rave-ups. Avail and Me First & The Gimmie Gimmies were at Emo's, NJ's Spiraling was playing across town at the Iron Cactus, and Yo La Tengo had the outdoor stage at Stubb's (with a line so long I couldn't get in,) so after wandering around Sixth Street for a while, I wound up at Emo's Annex (a tented outdoor stage thrown up expressly for SXSW) and checked out New Brunswick's Burnt By The Sun, an old-school mosh metal band from the old Melody Bar HC scene who, despite some technical problems, provided some powerful headbanging metalcore for the kids in the pit. (Not many badges at this show though.)

Saturday

I know, I know... there's hip hop at SXSW, there's a small battalion of very cool singer songwriters and country bands, there's even jazz... and a good rock critic should listen to everything. But I like rock n roll, and tonight, I got it in buckets, then a monsoon, and finally a tsunami. First stop: Armor For Sleep, a (very) young emo band from Teaneck that recently signed to Equal Vision, and whom I had never heard. They were tight, earnest, melodic, and even if they aren't reinventing the wheel, I've seen worse. Gabe Saporta from Midtown is managing them, so I got to say hello to him, which is always a pleasant experience, Gabe being one of the nicest guys in NJ punk. And I was impressed by how many people were singing along to Armor For Sleep's lyrics (not bad considering they don't even have a demo out yet!) Solea, featuring ex-members of Samiam, turned out to be a bit disappointing; not bad, but nothing special. So I popped next door to catch a Chicago singer/songwriter named David Singer that my buddy Jim DeRogatis likes a bunch. None of the melodies jumped out at me but I did like his very literal lyrical flair. I wanted to try and catch The Coral, but the line stretched two blocks so I doubled back to Emo's main room, where they were running a little late and I was able to catch all of NC's Cherry Valence. These guys are a great garage band with two drummers, both of whom switch off on lead singers. There's the stocky drummer with dark hair who has the more punk rock voice, and a skinny blonde shirtless dude who has this soulful Stax/Volt style that totally swings. As good as they were, though – and they totally rocked – they paled in comparison to the mighty Rye Coalition, whom I caught next at a big room called The Mercury. Even though guitarist Jon Gonnellii was illin' with the flu, these guys managed to surpass their barn-burning balls-to-the-wall performance from last year, totally thrashing the living daylights out their set of high-energy, lowbrown AC/DC inflected hard rock. Ow!! A quick jaunt back up Sixth Street back to Spill and it was Paris, Texas' turn to rock. I'd seen these Madison, Wisconsin mooks on a few tours and love their stuff – again, it's just garage rock, but with sweeter-than-usual melodies, funny lyrics, and a afro'd frontman who was all over the place – up on the speakers, out the window playing to the crowd on the sidewalk, in the middle of the crowd. Cherry Valence, Rye Coalition, Paris Texas -- bang, zoom, kapow! I was tired, sweaty, sore from bouncing up and down so much, and very very happy. After the one, two, three punch of those bands, even the catchy and literate pop rock of Ultimate Fakebook couldn't cut it, and I ended my 15th SXSW on a sweet rock 'n' roll high that guaranteed I'd be back.

Artie Shepherd, Instruction

CD Review:

It's a shame about Evan

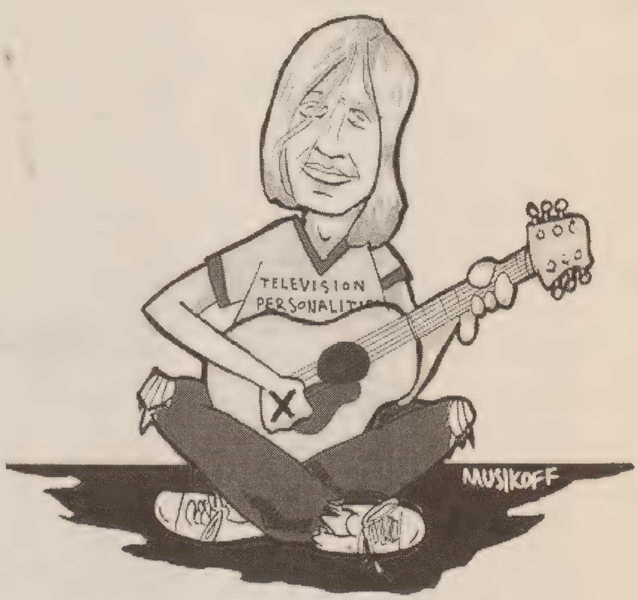
Review and art by Brian Musikoff

EVAN DANDO - *Baby I'm Bored* (Bar-None Records)

As a longtime Lemonheads fan, I had to take a while to place Evan Dando's first solo release in proper context before fairly digesting it. This is not a rock record. This is not a Lemonheads record. In fact, it can be argued that the last three Lemonheads releases (1992's *It's A Shame About Ray*, 1993's *Come On Feel The Lemonheads*, & 1998's *Car Button Cloth)* were not Lemonheads records, but rather the first three Dando solo releases. Why then, after seven albums and a "best of" CD, has Evan decided to drop the Lemonheads moniker? After being busted while on LSD and Heroin in Sidney, a nervous breakdown, rehab, a mediocre last album, and a departure from a major label, Dando took a much needed sabbatical. During this time he traveled, did monitors for Enya, helped record a Blake Babies reunion album (*God Bless the Blake Babies*- 2001), married, and relocated to NYC (blocks away from WTC, mind you). It's appears that these past couple years have been years of restructure, change, and simplification for Dando. Perhaps he needed to shed the name Lemonheads in order to proceed.

Written and recorded with the likes of Ben Lee (Australia's indie pop boy wonder), Howe Gelb (Giant Sand), John Convertino and Joey Burns (Calexico), Royston Langdon (Spacehog), and Chris Brokaw (Codeine/ Come/ Consonant), it's no surprise that the recording has a very moody, mellow, and mid-tempo feel to it. Opening with the lazy yet swirling "Repeat", the tone of the album is instantly set. Track 2 picks up where his last record (*Car Button Cloth*) left off, simple melodies mildly sung over a luke-warm strumming guitar, with a touch of buzzy guitar work buried every and there. *Hard Drive*, the album's most interesting and engaging song, is also the album's most simple and sparse sounding song. Written by Ben Lee, the song very sweetly offers a first person narrative of a rather ordinary existence. The song opens with, "This is the town I'm livin' in, this is the street I'm walking down". And you may find yourself living in a shotgun shack? The second half of the record starts to take on more of a Country twang. Tracks such as *It Looks Like You*, *Why Do You Do This To Yourself*, and *Grass All Wine Colored*, have a very simple Gram Parsons kind of feel about them.

During the 80's, after three albums on their then hometown independent label, Taang! Records, the Lemonheads departed for Atlantic Records. The Atlantic deal led to five releases before Evan took his seven year break from recording. Now that he is back in the game with a new CD to boot, Evan Dando has decided to release *Baby I'm Bored* on Jersey's own Bar-None records (home to talent such as Yo La Tengo, They Might Be Giants, DJ Spooky, and Alex Chilton, as well as local bands like Burnside Project). Perhaps this deal came into place as Bar-None is also home to the works of his long time friend Juliana Hatfield. As there is not really a loud chord to be found on this CD, I categorize the release under what I refer to as "breakfast music" (i.e.- a something to play while you are frying your omelet, hung over, on Sunday morning. Baby, I'm bored.



PANIC IN DETROIT

PANIC IN DETROIT - S/T
These Texans have lust for rock music in every detail: the songs, the attitude, the moves, the gear, you name it. With nods to the Foo Fighters and Elvis Costello, and owing more to the Marshalls of AC/DC and the guitar harmonies of Thin Lizzy, this self-titled EP will rock you - guaranteed.

www.panicindetroit.com

STANDSTILL

STANDSTILL - MEMORIES COLLECTOR
Spain's Standstill has toured Europe with Cave-In and At the Drive-In. "Memories Collector", their second full length, is a post-hardcore masterpiece on par with any of their contemporaries.

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March Metal Meltdown

Review by Dan Novak
Photos by Colleen Umberger

March Metal Meltdown, Irvington, NJ - March 7,8,9, 2003

One place in NJ where you are least likely to see a heavy metal concert, let alone a three-day metal festival, would have to be Irvington. Once you entered the door to this year's March Metal Meltdown, though, a different story unraveled. Bands from all walks of the Earth emerged. Bands that battled on Friday night alone came from Austria, Germany, Amsterdam, Holland, Sweden, and several from the U.S. States.

The first band to catch the crowd's attention was Darkane. "This is the greatest metal band alive," said Beyond The Flesh frontman Justin Leary. Darkane hails from Sweden and has been on the heavy metal scene 1998. Andreas Sydow, the lead singer of the band, stood out most in my mind for his facial expressions. The lyrics to some of his songs matched his facial expressions. I was convinced by looks alone that he was in fact, a psychopath.

After Darkane came a band formerly named Stuck Mojo. Recently, they have merged with WWE wrestling superstar Chris Jericho to form Fozzy. Songs like 'Eat The Rich' and 'To Kill a Stranger' sound better live then on their CD! Most people thought that this guy is no singer but even so he had a stage presence that was unmatched. What most heavy metal bands lack is muscle! If you are going to sing songs about death and destruction, I am not buying it if your band is completely out of shape. Fozzy's Friday Night performance really set the stage for bands to come.

Saturday night was highlighted by one band. The band started off key and out of tune. At that point, I thought I was going to write this article to sit here and trash them. Well, about midway into their set, they introduced a soloist named James Murphy. James Murphy was great and really energized the band. Their last tune left me thinking of two quotes: "Finish strong," and "Leave everything on stage."

That night also featured a band with white make-up and black eye shadow known as Impaler. The opening note featured fake blood oozing out of the singer's mouth that led me to wonder, "What Halloween store did these guys rob?" From their album *One Nation Under Ground* they performed a song called "The Scream Machine" which proved they had some NJ roots.

After over thirty hours of music, I was exhausted! It was late Sunday night and I wondered what more can these headliner bands do? Then Behemoth from Poland hit the stage. Behemoth got the crowd going once again. They were followed by Amon Amarth, who were really cool and played a flawless set. It seemed that everyone was banging their heads as almost an involuntary action! Finally, after about a half hour of setting up, Deicide hit the stage. This band was the headliner throughout the entire Metal Meltdown and for good reason. I was warned by a fan that when Deicide performs, all hell breaks loose. That fan was not kidding. Thanks to the added security, I doubt anyone died but even I found a few scratches on me.

To anyone who wants to see something cool and different please consider next year's show! Local bands and national acts combine their talent to blow your mind! You pay about $75 to see OzzFest here in New Jersey in the summer, which features around eighteen bands. For the March Metal Meltdown, you can pay that same price and see eighteen bands a day up close for three days. For those who do not believe in Heavy Metal Music.... Seeing is believing!

Photo: Chris Jericho of Fozzy by Colleen Umberger

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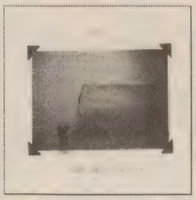

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never mind THE BUCKLEYS

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HERE'S ours

By Jim Testa

Ours may not boast platinum records or be headlining arena tours, but the Jersey-based bands two albums have created enough of a stir for the band to be noticed. Fronted by the dark, brooding Jimmy Gnecoo, the band leaped into the public eye with the release of 2001's *Distorted Lullabies*. But Ours actually has a long history that predates its major label debut. That band started gigging out around New Jersey and New York City back in the early Nineties, with a lineup that included Gnecco and guitarist Dave Milone. Back then, in the period around 1991-1993, Ours gained a reputation as a goth band, and released a demo tape called "Sour" that made Gnecco come across as a musical version of Anne Rice's Lestate the vampire, a dark and foreboding creature of the night. Gnecco's striking good looks – as gaunt and dark as the music – earned them some attention, although the band played plenty of shows in tiny dingy clubs like Greenwich Village's Scrap Bar and Bleecker Street's The Undergound.

Then rumors started to spread that the band had been signed to a mega-dollar deal to the then-brand new mega-label Dreamworks and Ours disappeared from the public eye. Guitarist Dave Milone, who had been in and out of Ours several times by that point, resurfaced in the Teenbeaters, while Gnecco retooled the band and worked on a debut album. Then finally, years after inking their deal, a new version of Ours surfaced and released *Distorted Lullabies* in 2001. Critics were quick to latch onto Gnecco's dreamlike falsetto and compared him (often unfavorably) to the late Jeff Buckley. Right around the time that *Distorted Lullabies* was released, Milone disbanded the Teenbeaters and rejoined Ours for several major tours. Milone stayed with the band this time around and Ours released its second album, *Precious*, in November of 2002. It was a significant departure from its heavily overdubbed and (some said) overproduced predecessor – more organic, looser, and with more of a rock feel. I felt it was one of the best major-label albums of the year, so happily I was able to hook up with frontman Jimmy Gnecco by telephone and talk to him in January, 2003.

Q: When *Distorted Lullabies* was released, it seemed obvious that someone decided to market Ours as Jimmy Gnecco, solo artist, rather than as a band. The press photo that went out with the CD was a close-up of you, the first video featured you singing with shadowy figures playing in the background, and so on. Was that your decision or the label's?

Jimmy: What you have to realize is that at the time the record actually came out, I didn't have a band. There was a lot of tumult and we changed quite a few members. So there really wasn't a band that we could promote at that time. It wasn't anyone's decision, it was just that there wasn't anybody but me to use to promote the record. After *Distorted Lullabies* was finished, Dave (Milone) came back to the group and that gave us some foundation to build on and now I can say that we're a band again.

Q: If there's one name you probably never want to hear again, it's Jeff Buckley. Especially in the reviews for *Distorted Lullabies*, you were not only compared to him but often even accused to trying to imitate his vocal style. What was your reaction to those comparisons.

Jimmy: It was really hard. If I had read "this guy sounds like Bono" in a lot of press, I wouldn't have been as surprised… or as aggravated, because I grew up listening to U2. I didn't grow up listening to Jeff. I knew Jeff, and I loved him, and I loved his music. But Ours was doing what we were doing long before I became aware of Jeff Buckley. And you can go back to recordings that we did, back in '92 and '93, and you'll hear me singing the same way that I sang on *Distorted Lullabies.* In a way, I understood the comparison, because I use my voice kind of like Jeff, in that sense. Slightly acrobatic and jumping all over the place. But I personally don't think I sound like Jeff. When I heard *OK Computer,* I thought that Thom Yorke sounded a lot more like Jeff than I ever did. Yet I love that record and I love Radiohead. Radiohead, Coldplay, MUSE… I think they all sound more like Jeff than I do. And yet those are all bands that I love.

Q: I think it might just be that before Jeff Buckley came around, there weren't many male falsettos in mainstream rock. And now there are tons of them. So that's the obvious connection for the press to make when they hear a guy who sings a lot of falsetto.

Jimmy: You're right, and I think that's unfortunate for Ours. I have a lot of tapes of us with me singing that way ten years ago, which nobody knows about. I actually got that style from listening to Sarah McClachlan, and learning every song on her *Solace* record. When I graduated from high school in 1991, shortly after that I just listened to so much Sarah McClachlan – and also Lenny Kravitz – that's when I started singing in falsetto. And then years later I heard Jeff, and I was just like, oh man, here's somebody who's sort of singing like I sing. Which would never take away from what he was, because he made some amazing records. So in that sense, I couldn't really slag him for it, because he was doing a really good job of it.

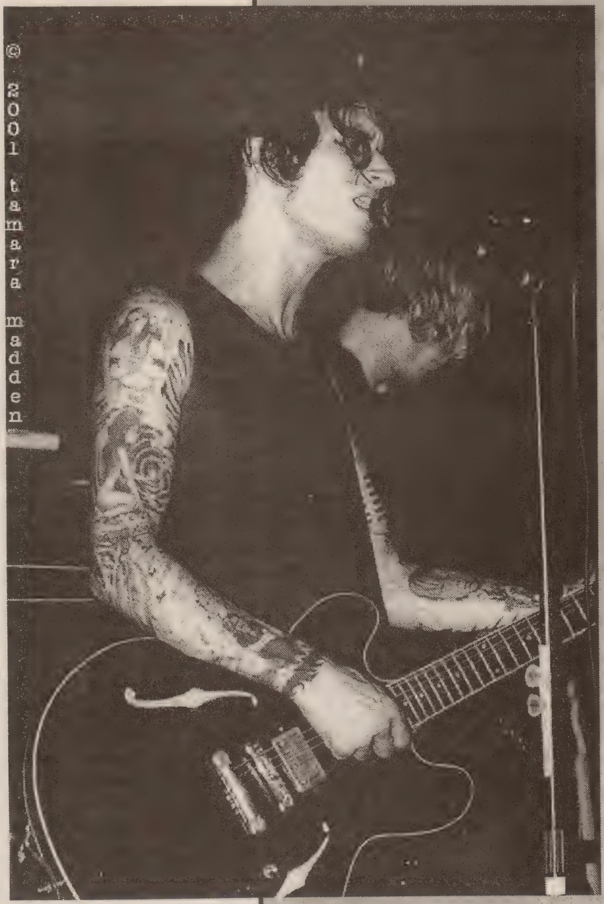
Q: I've been listening to your new CD, *Precious*, a lot lately and I want to throw another comparison at you that you probably haven't heard before, and that's the band Live. Your voice doesn't sound anything like Ed Kowalcyk's but there's something about the way both of you sing, and the things you sing about, that makes me think that your whole approach to music is very intertwined with your spirituality. It's like there's a yearning there for something higher, and you're using music to try and reach it.

Jimmy: I would fully agree with that. I've always loved that band as well. I would not only agree with that but I would take it as a huge compliment. I would say that's definitely why we're making music.

Q: The other thing about *Precious*, which goes back to what you said before about the lineup changing so much, is that I think this sounds much more like a band record than *Distorted Lullabies.*

Jimmy: It is. There was even a lot more that I wanted to do on the record as far as overdubs and whatnot, but I left it… Because I thought, let's just leave it really raw, like a Zeppelin record, like a Queen record. And whether that comes across, that was really our intent.

Q: There's a song on *Precious* that Dave Milone wrote. I understand that's actually an old song that you used to do before the Dreamworks deal came along.



Jimmy: It's a song that he had that we used to play, back in '95. We got back together and played for a few months at that time. It was a song that we wanted to record, although it needed a bit of work. But I always thought there was something special about that song. I wanted to sing it because I guess that was my rebuttal to everyone who said that I sounded like Jeff. Or anyone that said we needed to make a pop record. That song says, we can do all that, or we can none of that if we want to. And I thought he had some great lyrics at the beginning of it. I reworked it a bit in the studio so it would fit the album, but I love that song.

Q: And whose idea was it to cover "Femme Fatale?" That took me by surprise.

Jimmy: It was my idea. I felt like – again, while we were doing a section of the record where I was singing someone else's song and interpreting that, I felt that "Femme Fatale" was a song that I alway wanted to sing. So I figured, while we were going for it, we might as well do another one.

Photos by Tamara Madden

Q: I was surprised by some of the reviews that either didn't like the version or thought it was out of context for you to be covering the Velvet Underground. I think it fits the album fine. And there have been so many great versions of that song, from REM to another old Jersey band, Dramarama, who used to do it.

Jimmy: I've heard of Dramarama but I never heard their version of that song. I did know the Big Star version. But I still felt like I wanted to hear it sung out a little more.

Q: It's a good version. And I just like the idea of bands doing covers. It lets the listener compare what you do with the song to what Michael Stipe or Alex Chilton or whomever did with it. Plus it's just fun to do covers, isn't it?

Jimmy: Very much so. We just felt like on this one, we just needed to show a few different sides of ourselves, since we were getting pounded and pounded about just being a Buckley wannabe band. All along, I felt like I had more of myself to show, and more of what each of the guys in the band had to bring. So we just wanted to try and do some different things.

Q: The record's been out for over six months now and obviously it hasn't broken any chart records. How have the people at the label been about its performance? Are you getting the vibe that they're still happy with you? That they want to do another Ours record?

Jimmy: I was kind of over it the second we put it to bed. I was excited to go out and play the songs, but I was already working on the next record and thinking about that. Everybody was really excited to have completed it, but now we're definitely moving on, and doing our best to keep growing and write new songs.

Q: So what's next? More touring on this record, or work on the new record?

Jimmy: We're mostly going to be home writing some new songs for the next few months, and then we'll go back into the studio and start recording this next record. And forever search for a higher feeling. The search continues.

Q: The environment at the major label level now is so cutthroat, you see bands getting dropped two weeks after their record is released if radio doesn't jump all over the first single. But Dreamworks seems to be interested in letting you mature and build an audience. Is that the sense you have?

Jimmy: Yeah, and we definitely feel their support on a long-term level. We'll see. It's such a tough time right now, it's hard to sit back and feel sorry for the music industry when the entire world is suffering right now. You talk about disappointment about this record, or whatever success we may or may not have reached. But it's really hard for me to think about record sales when we're about to go to war, and the economy is terrible, and people are losing their jobs. It's really, really tough times. How many records we sell or don't sell really doesn't seem all that important. The thing that makes me the most proud of this record is that we made a relevant record to the times, and an honest record lyrically. That makes me proud, and makes me content enough to say that I'm on to the next one. There are always going to be things when you listen back that you'll say, oh, I could've changed that or I could've done that better. But that was the whole point of this record, not to be too 'precious' about it and make sure that the intent of what we were doing comes across.

Q: Did you grow up in NJ?

Jimmy: I've lived in New Jersey my whole life. I grew up in Bergen County. The whole band comes from New Jersey.
The four of us who played on *Precious* are still together, and right now we're working on making sure that we can keep the lineup where the people who make the records are the same people who go out and tour.

Q: Back when I first met Ours, you guys were barely out of high school, and you were really into the whole goth thing then.

Jimmy: Yeah, we were all goth'd out back then.

Q: I remember that well – black mascara, everybody in black clothing, dyed black hair... And even then, I remember being amazed at the full-sleeve tattoos up and down your arms. What was your first tattoo?

Jimmy: It was on my back. It was kinda like this portrait of Dave the guitar player.

Q: How old were you?

Jimmy: I was 16.

Q: Did you know even then that someday you would be like the Amazing Illustrated Man and be covered in body art?

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Photo by Mike Zinn, www.bandshots.com

Jimmy: You know, I got my first one. That made me go back and want to get one on my arm. I got the one on my arm and I woke up the next morning from a nightmare where I knew that I was going to completely cover myself and I can't stop myself. And at that point, I knew that I would be covered. But I didn't always know it.

Q: I guess you have to look at it like an investment, like painting your house.

Jimmy: (laughs) Yeah. And there's a lot of history and reminders. I've been tattooed now for 13 years and every one of them has a history and reminds me of something different.

Q: Any regrets?

Jimmy: Nope.

Q: I've always wondered about people who get into tattooing like you. Maybe it's because I'm from a different generation, but I've never had the slightest desire to have people stick needles and ink into my skin.

Jimmy: Well, I'm not too into needles either, to tell you the truth. One thing that's odd about the process is that there's a certain feeling of punishment you get from being tattooed, and then afterwards, there's a certain high where all your endorphins kick in. So there is a rush to it.

Q: Let me ask you this: What if you had a 14-year old son who said, Dad, I want to get a tattoo. What would you say to him?

Jimmy: I would say, be careful on your subject matter. Be certain of it. And choose your tattoo carefully. That's the big thing to me, the difference between a good tattoo, a classy tattoo and a bad one is your subject matter. And find a good artist. If my 14 year old son came to me and wanted to get a tattoo, I'd probably say, let's wait until you're 18, and then I'll take you to a good artist and get it done right. Times have changed, though, and if the worst thing that's going on is that kids want to get tattooed, then we're doing okay. Almost everyone in my life, everybody that's important to me, is tattooed, and I consider myself to have really good friends and be surrounded by really good human beings.

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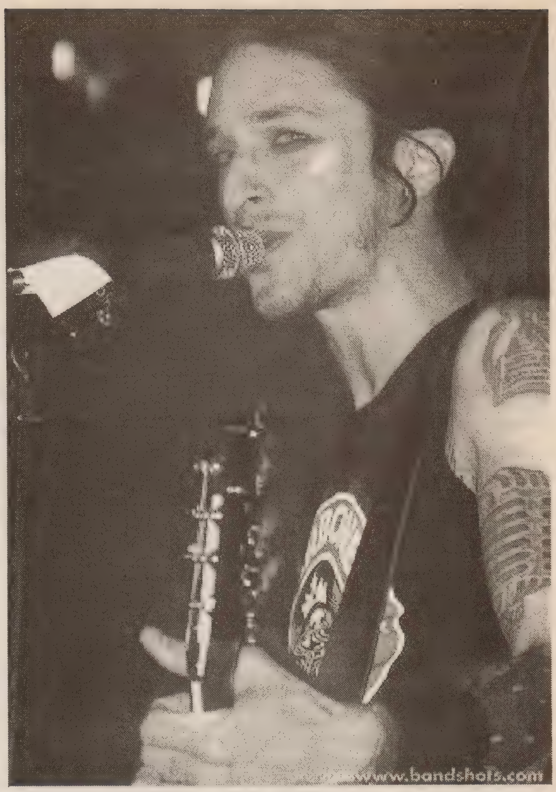
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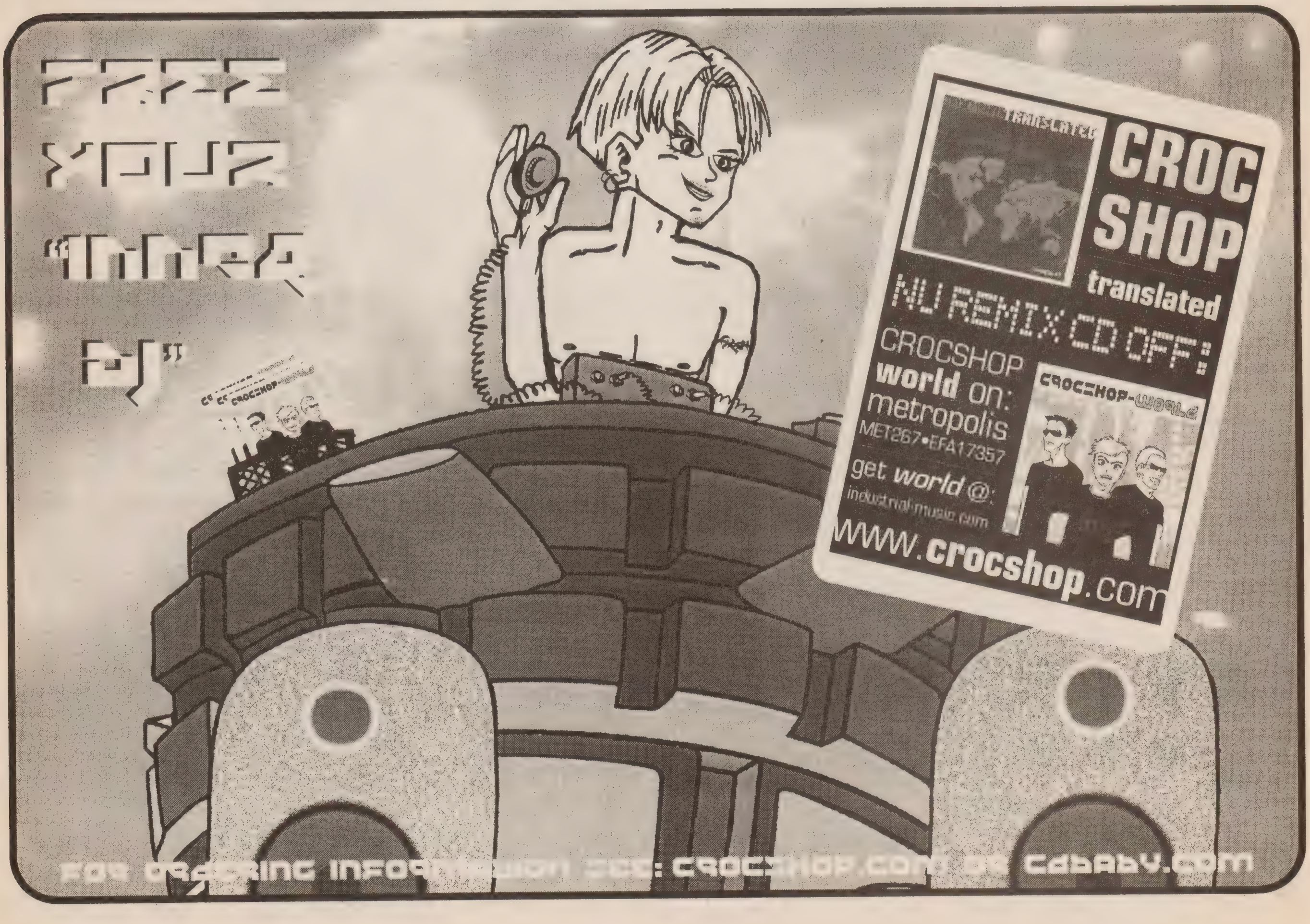

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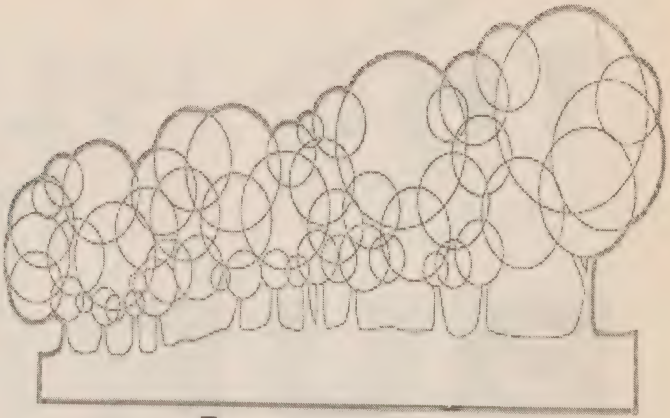


palomar

from brooklyn, with love

by Jim Testa

Rachel Warren - vocals, guitar
Matt Houser – drums, vocals
Sarah Brockett – bass, vocals
Christina Prostano – guitar, vocals

It's almost scary what a black hole New York City can be for the talented. Palomar has been a steady presence in the NYC/Brooklyn club scene for years now. The band's 2001 sophomore release *Palomar II* earned rave reviews from the likes of the Village Voice, The New York Times, Time Out-New York, CMJ, and scads of fanzines. And the band's peppery stage presence and energetic live performances have elevated the group above the muck & mire of the Tuesday night-at-The Baggott Inn brigade of NYC wannabe's to prestige gigs at upscale venues like The Knitting Factory and the Bowery Ballroom. And yet, compared to the frenzy over NYC bands like Interpol, Longwave, Mooney Suzuki, or the Yeah Yeah Yeah's, they're still virtually unknown.

The roots of Palomar go back to Rachel Warren's late-nineties punkish pop band Trixie Belden, who released a split EP with downtown punk/popsters Egghead. When Trixie Belden lost its drummer, the band wound up reforming with Rachel again on guitar and vocals, Matt Houser on drums, and Sasha Alcott on bass. "We decided that we needed a little more guitar in the mix," notes Rachel, so the band recruited Rachel's former Trixie Belden bandmate Christina Prostano.

"Sasha was a songwriter herself and eventually she decided that she wanted to do her own thing," adds Rachel; so Sasha left Palomar a little over a year ago to form Sasha Alcott & The Possibilities, and Palomar recruited newbie Sarah Brockett.

Since then, critics and fans alike have delighted to Palomar's flinty, catchy, harmony-laden and slightly unconventional pop songs . Billboard's Chris Morris exalted the band's "sharp melodic sensibility with angular punkisms," while Jon Pareles of The New York Times noted that "whimsy and sinew coexist nicely in the lean, peppy pop rock of Palomar, a three-woman, one-man band whose songs jump from blithe choruses to wiry guitar patterns to hefty distortion, all at the service of the lyrics' articulate ambivalence."

So do yourself a favor and forget what the hipster blogs are hyping this week. Get yourself to a Palomar show and be converted. In the meantime, you can get to know these three gals-and-a-guy in this interview, conducted in their Williamsburg rehearsal space (a converted garage a few blocks from the Lorimer Street L Train stop) shortly before they embarked on an ambitious month-long tour of the USA, including their second visit to the SXSW Music & Media Conference in Austin, Texas.

Q: There's this stereotype that women in bands have to get by on their looks and personality because they don't play their instruments as well as guys do. Rachel, as one of the most outspoken and frank women I've ever met, do you think you're judged by a double standard, and how do you feel about that stereotype?

Rachel: Well, it is actually true.

Q: That people think that way, or that girls really don't play their instruments as well as boys?

Rachel: It is true that we don't play guitar as well, but that's because we didn't start when we were 12.

Matt: That's probably true. I think most boys grow up with the typical rock-star fantasy and start playing instruments real early. There probably aren't as many role models for young girls.

Q: Well, when did you start playing an instrument, and what was your inspiration or role model?

Christina: I started singing in bands pretty young and I've been singing in bands for a long time, but I just wanted to be in Palomar so badly that I was willing to learn any instrument… so it was guitar or the oboe and I decided guitar might be more appropriate.

Rachel: Plus oboe is really hard to learn.

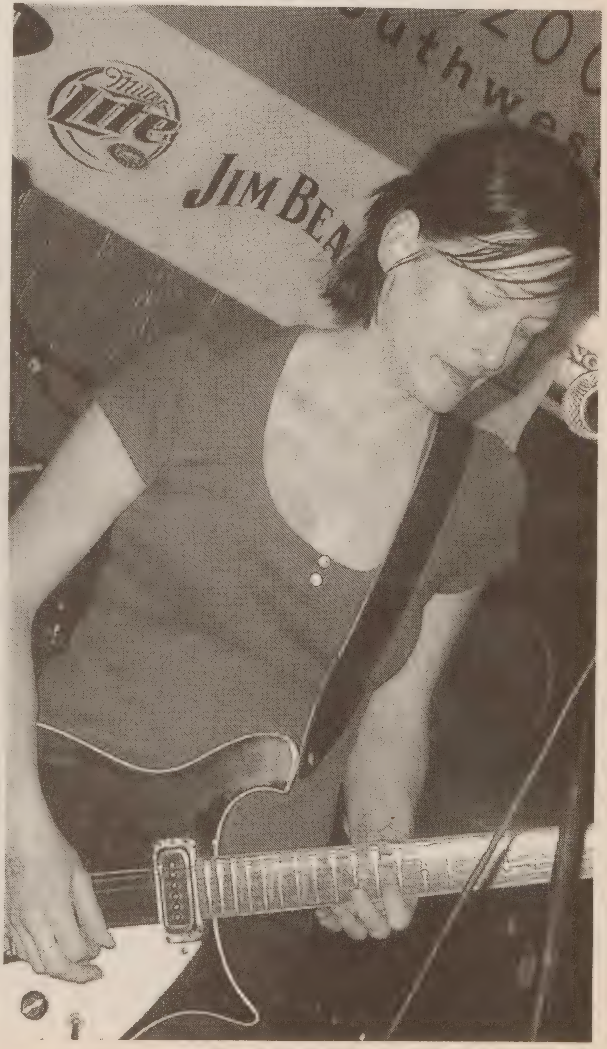
Christina: Yeah, and I wanted to play well enough to be in the band quickly, so I picked guitar.

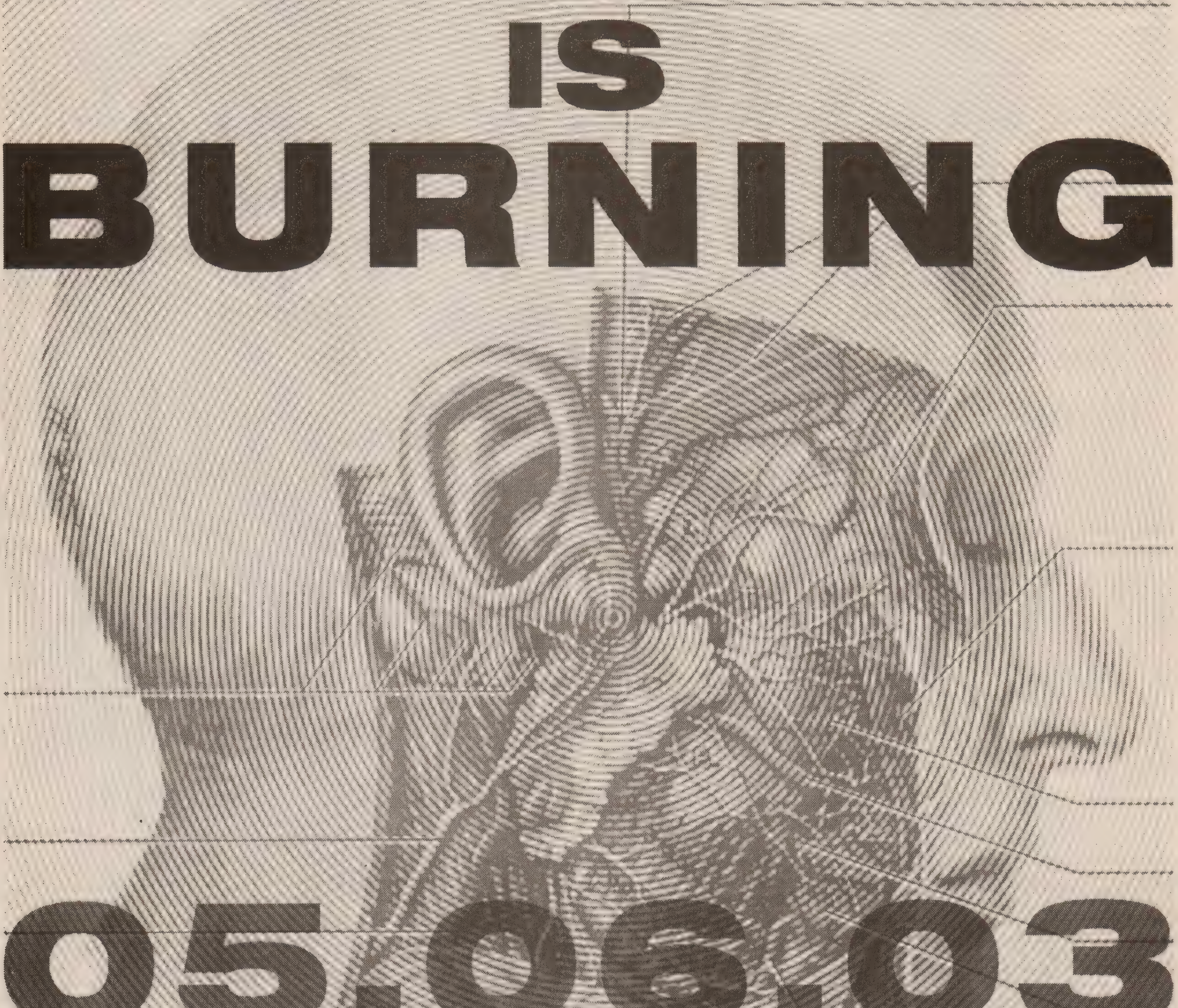
Q: So were you playing in high school or…

Christina: No, it was the year 2000 when I picked up the guitar. I'm a really fast learner.

Rachel: I can play guitar but just don't ask me what chord I'm playing or which string is which. I'm living off the stereotype of the girl who can't play guitar.

Sarah: I did learn in high school - but only because there was a bass sitting around in my house. It's kind of a long story. It was my sister's bass and then she left for college and it was





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just sitting there. And then I decided to be a Robert Palmer girl (like in the video) for Halloween, because they all had white basses and I actually had a white bass in my house. So I used the bass for my Halloween costume and that made me more aware that it was just sitting there, so I started to noodle around with it and eventually learned to play.

Q: Were you ever tempted to learn guitar? A lot of bassists also play guitar. And usually the story goes, 'I got stuck playing bass because there were already two guitar players in the band.'

Sarah: No, I'm not like that. I was never a guitar player.

Q: Some bass players play a rhythm instrument, and just play off the drums, and some play a melody instrument, and actually carry the lead in songs. Which are you?

Rachel and Christina: Melodic, melodic!! (everyone laughs)

Q: Let's ask the drummer. Matt, how would you describe Sarah ?

Matt: A rock-solid melodic bassist with real heart. (laughs)

Rachel: ...who answered a personal ad and got into our band.

Q: Rachel, how about you?

Rachel: I started the year after I graduated from college, I was going out to see punk bands all the time. And I was hanging out with this friend who played bass, so we just started playing together and he sort of taught me. And then when I moved to New York, for some reason, I just decided to start a band. Usually, you start a band because you've written a bunch of songs and want to play them. But with me, I just wanted to start a band, and then we started to write some songs so we'd have something to play. So I've been playing for a while, but I've never had any lessons. I think there's a lot of it that you pick up a lot of it just by learning to play things you like. I think it's pretty easy to pick up the guitar, because you really just have to play power chords at first and you can get by. You learn the magic five and then you just go from there.

Q: When people think of Palomar, one of the first words that comes to mind is fast, because you do all these really speedy tunes. Is that something that you consciously tried to do?
Rachel: Well, we always did play fast, but we have some slow songs now.

Matt: Yeah, we've been slowing it down a little lately. I don't know if that's a sign of becoming more comfortable with melodies, or just getting old and lazy.

Rachel: I think it's just that if a band is evolving, then you are going to move away from a style and go for something else, or else just get stagnant and boring. You have to evolve as you're writing songs. If you don't, then you're just writing the same songs that you wrote four years ago. And that's boring.

Q: Palomar has been around for four years now, almost five, and you were playing in Trixie Belden before that, which had a similar sound.

Rachel: Hey! (everyone laughs) Well, you're right, but Trixie Belden was more punky and simpler. We have that tendency now too, but we're getting more sophisticated. If you listen carefully, you can hear a lot more growing up.

Q: So did the speedy thing just happen because you wanted to be a poppy punk band?

Rachel: Well, that's what we were. Trixie Belden was punk. (to Matt) Don't give me that look. We were, we were punk!

Q: Well, Trixie Belden did a split EP with Egghead and they were pretty punk.

Rachel: You remember that? Well, Egghead wasn't punk, they were like the Queers.

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Q: Hey, the Queers are as punk as it gets!

Rachel: They're not hardcore, though. Egghead were like Blink 182 or something.

Q: Only nerdier.

Rachel: Well, you have a copy of our record. You can hear on that that we've certainly changed since Trixie Belden.

Q: *Palomar II*? Of course, I loved that record. I especially like the songs where Rachel and Matt both sing lead vocals, back and forth. There are a couple like that. How do you write those? Do you both write, or does one of you come up with the whole song and just assign the vocal parts?

Rachel: Both, kind of. Usually I have an idea, and then we all work on it. Matt is really good at thinking up harmonies. He's a harmonic genius.

Q: Which is unusual for a drummer, since there aren't a lot of chords on the drums.

Matt: There are not.

Rachel: One thing that makes Matt so great is that he always comes up with new ideas for whatever we're doing. Whether it's a totally different beat or a vocal harmony or whatever, he takes the songs and makes them better.

Christina: As opposed to most drummers, who just try to stay out of the way and play the drums.

Q: There have been shows where I've just watched Matt the whole set because he was doing such interesting things.

Rachel: I watch Matt because he's so handsome.

Matt: No comment.

Q: So... you've been in New York City bands for at least five years, so you've been part of the scene here pre-Strokes and post-Strokes. In your experience, how have things changed?

Rachel: They haven't changed at all, because the Strokes were never a New York band. They played two shows here and then they left.

Christina: I agree on that point.

Rachel: Do you think they changed anything?

Q: I think things have changed here to a certain extent in that people around the country and in New York are paying more attention to the bands here than they were four years ago.

Rachel: That's probably true.

Q: I don't think a band like Interpol would have been on the cover of *Spin* four years ago.

Rachel: Well, what bands were here before the Strokes that anybody would have written about?

Q: There weren't any really good ones but there were bands that labels were throwing a lot of money at, like D-Generation, Jonathan Fire*Eater and Spacehog and Nancy Boy. They all got major label deals but nobody noticed them, not even here in NYC. And now, certainly the local media is paying more attention to local music, and a lot of the national rock press is writing about NYC bands. I just don't know if any of that has trickled down to you.

Christina: Well, I think the music press is paying more attention to a certain kind of music, that whole garage rock thing, and that's helped some NY bands and a lot of bands from outside New York, like the Hives and the Vines and so on. But we're not a garage rock band.

Rachel: I think that's the most strange thing, that there are all these bands who are garagey or mod or whatever they are, and then there are bands like us that don't sound like that. Like a Ted Leo band. He's just working really hard, and people just listen to Ted Leo because they like him and they like his music. But it's interesting that there's this whole movement that's being hyped, and then there are some select bands who do okay who aren't part of that movement. Like Interpol. What are they doing? They sound like the Smiths. Why are they getting caught up in this?

Q: But you don't sense that there's something going on in NY now that wasn't going on a few years ago, just in terms of people's interest in local music? Within the city as a whole, and then trickling down to you?

Rachel: We're way down there. It'll take a long time to trickle. I think there probably has been something like that, maybe even something that's had an effect on us... but if you're in the middle of it, it all happens so gradually that it's really hard to be aware of it.

Matt: It is hard to tell. There's more stuff on the radio now that we like, I think, than a few years ago.

Christina: Different things happen to bands at different stages too. If we were on our fifth album and this whole NY thing happened, it might be very different. If there is a trend towards New York bands, it's going to affect you differently if you're just starting out than if you're well along in your career. There's a steady process when you're a growing band – the shows get a little better, the crowds get a little bigger. That's happening to us, but whether it's happening because there's this trend in NY or just because we're working hard and progressing... it's hard to tell. It's different for bands who just come out of nowhere and instantly they're on the cover of magazines, like say the Yeah Yeah Yeah's.

Matt: I kind of prefer not being under a microscope like that. I like things progressing slowly and naturally and organically.

Rachel: It is better. It's like the whole difference between a democracy where the people elect

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a leader, and a dictatorship, where you're told who's going to be the leader. That sounds weird, but a band like the Yeah Yeah Yeah's are just appointed by a handful of people. Their being popular or not hasn't really been based on whether a whole lot of people really like them, the Common Man.

Q: One of the most confusing parts of this kind of discussion is that people often talk about "the New York scene" as if it were one monolithic entity. Whereas, as you know, New York is really a lot of little cliques and mini-scenes that swirl and eddy around one another. For instance, I think Palomar has a certain relationship with a certain circle of bands, so you see a lot of the same faces at each other's shows.

Rachel: Well, we make fun of each other.

Q: Oh come on, you know what I mean. You recognize each other's existence and you try to support one another's gigs. There are literally a thousand bands in NYC that you've never heard of or met, even though you go out to shows all the time and keep current with what's happening here. And then there is that small circle of bands that you do know.

Christina: No, I know what you mean. We stick together and we try to trade shows and we go to see one another play.

Q: I found that all the time I'll meet a new band in the city and discover they have this whole sub-set of bands that they hang out with and play with, and I never knew any of them existed. And it's almost impossible to communicate the enormity of just how many bands there are in New York when you're writing for a mass publication like *Spin* or *Time Out New York* or something.

Rachel: The weird thing is that it used to be more that way for us. It used to be that we have a clique but we really don't have one anymore. If you look at that whole Negatones-Tris McCall-Girl Harbor clique, we used to be a part of that but we really aren't anymore.

Christina: I think that's just because we've made more of an effort to play outside of New York in the last year or so. When you're looking for gigs in the city, you're always looking for bands to share a bill or to trade gigs with, because then your fans see their band and their fans see you, and it helps both of you. But when you're trying to play in other cities, those local connections become less important. When we play in the city now, we're always trying to get on bills with other kinds of bands, or bands from other cities, so we can get to know them and trade gigs. It helps us a lot more than just playing to the same people here over and over.

Rachel: Plus there are a lot of great bands from out of town.

Q: Do you guys still do all your own booking?

Rachel: We do. And we're really good at it too. The other thing about the whole New York City clique thing is that after a certain amount of time, it's really not necessary anymore. After you've played the same clubs a few times, you can get a show there yourself because they know you, you don't have to rely on your friends to set up a show for you. The other thing is, we just finished booking our tour, which is three and a half weeks all across the country, and it really wasn't very hard this time. Was it?

Matt: No, it really wasn't.

Rachel: And I think that's because we have a lot of really good press from our last album, and we're really good at getting people to come to our website and finding out about us. It probably does make a difference if you have a booking agent making calls for you. But I don't think it makes that much of a difference.

Matt: It definitely helps to be on a label and have some press.

Q: But going back to what we were talking about before, does it help now when you say, "Hi, we're Palomar from New York City, can we play your club in Cleveland?" Does being from New York suddenly have more clout than it did a few years ago?

Rachel: I think it does. It matters a lot more in certain places than in others. Like in Birmingham, they're really impressed when you're from New York. But Cleveland might be a little harder to impress. And it means next to nothing in Boston.

Christina: One thing we've found is that Internet radio really helps. We'll get emails from people who have heard us on WFMU and they're from the other side of the county. That's such a great opportunity for bands like us. That they've actually heard us on the radio.

Q: And you don't have to spend money mailing out presskits all over the country and even more money paying promotions people to get you on broadcast radio. You just put a link on your website and they can listen to you on their computers wherever they are. Speaking of your website, the Press section is really impressive, you got some terrific reviews. Can you remember any of the really stupid or negative things that people wrote about you?

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Rachel: You're not going to bring those up now, are you?

Q: Sure, why not? (everyone laughs)

Christina: You can just look at the website, really. We put all the reviews right up there, good or bad. But let me think if there were any that really stand out... There was this one review that didn't mention anything about the music, it was just about how the writer wanted to date all of us...

Q: Including Matt, as I recall.

Rachel: Right. He wanted us to be his three girlfriends *and* his boyfriend and just hang out with us. Wasn't there one that made us really mad?

Matt: There was that one where the guy said that listening to the record made him want to go out and kill...

Rachel: I always get mad when people say we're really cute, meaning our songs. Because I always figure they haven't really listened close enough to realize that we're being ironic. That's my theory, anyway.

Q: I can see that. If you listen superficially, there's the high-pitched girlie voices, but if you actually listen to the lyrics, you've definitely got a chip on your shoulder.

Rachel: And that's all it takes to make a girl not cute. One little chip and it's all over.

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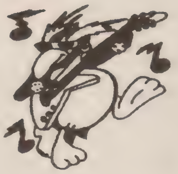
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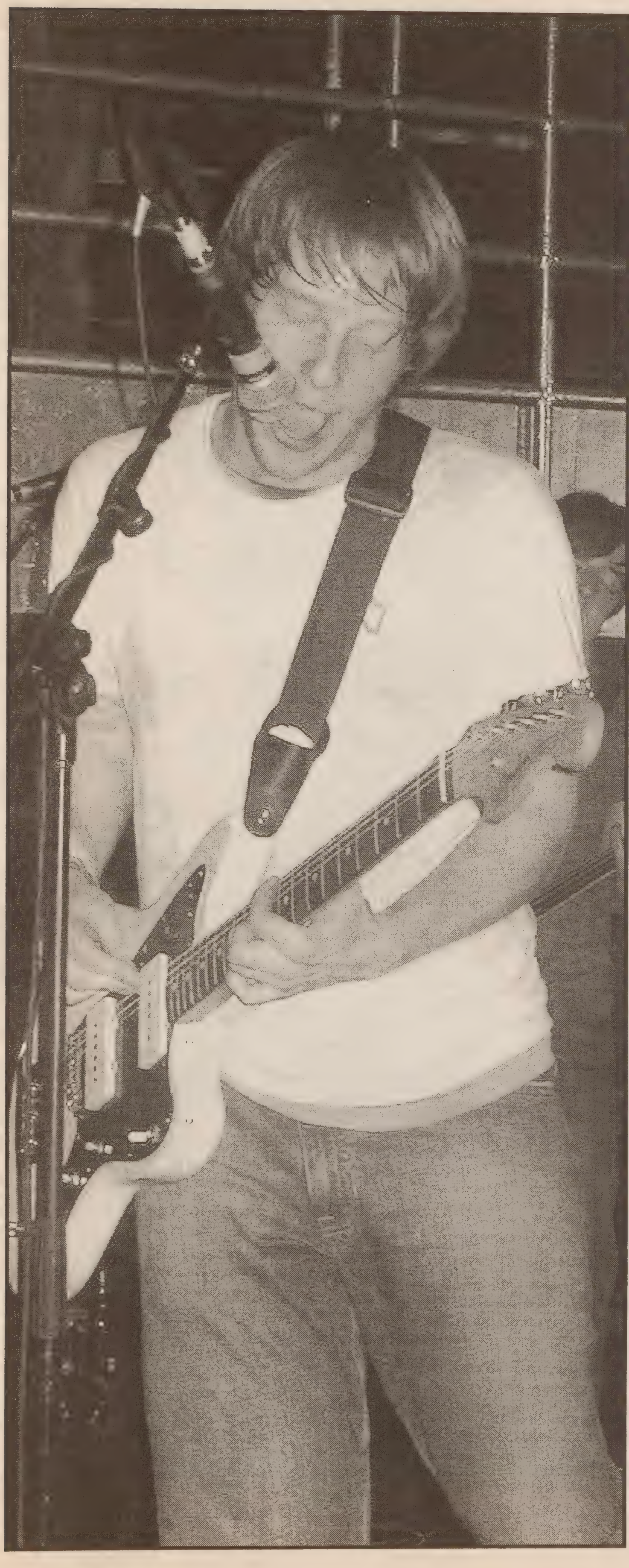


By Jim Testa

At the Punk Temple, an all-ages, volunteer-run venue in an actual Jewish temple somewhere between here and Coney Island in Brooklyn, they post a small sign under the archway that separates the main concert space from the "backstage" area where bands set up. It reads: *"All bands are asked to please remember to rock really fucking hard. Thank you."*

The Miracle Of 86 doesn't need to be asked. I had been hearing about the group for months – hearing good things too – especially since Mike Skinner, big brother of one of my best friends and favorite musicians, Dan Skinner of Sabado Domingo, joined the band. But it was one of those things – every time Miracle Of 86 had a show, I had to be someplace else. I knew they were packing the Punk Temple on a regular basis, as well as showing up on bills at prestige NYC venues like the Knitting Factory, Mercury Lounge, and Bowery Ballroom. And I figured, from the bands they were opening for, that they'd be somewhere between pop-punk and emo. Which is true, in a way. Sorta like saying the Beatles were somewhere between Elvis and Mozart. Then I finally got to see them – at one of those Punk Temple shows – and "blown away" doesn't begin to describe it. They are tight. They are loud. They'll hate me for saying this, but they are almost shamelessly cute. They smile big smiles, and jump really high, and move around constantly.

the. miracleof86

They conjure up memories of bands that effortlessly filled big rooms with the same feelings of joy and passion and release and empowerment, bands like Soulside and American Standard and 7 Seconds and The Descendents. They sing the kind of feel-good melodies that get huge crowds of kids on their tiptoes singing along to every word. They rock really fucking hard.

And then there's their new album, *Every Famous Last Word.* Most emo bands think Ian Mackaye invented rock and roll in 1988. All too many pop-punk bands think three catchy chords and a slaphappy grin make good music. The Miracle of 86 quote the Velvet Underground, Yo La Tengo, REM, Television, Bright Eyes, Big Star, every magical pop band in the Elephant 6 Collective out of Athens, Gram Parsons, and some sort of Grand Parkway country twang that Kevin Devine picked up God knows where… and they still manage to rock really fucking hard.

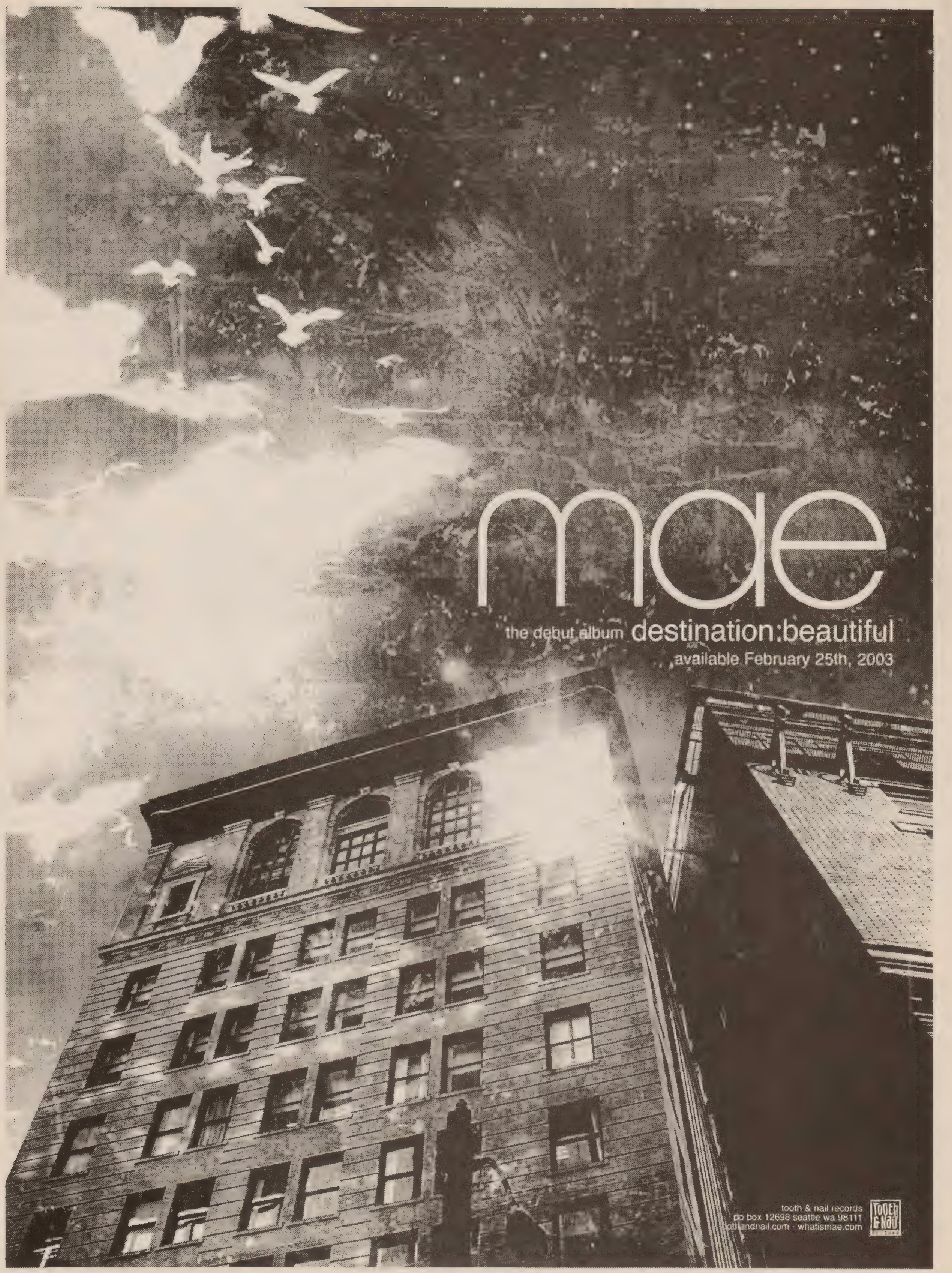
The Miracle of 86 are clean cut, not scruffy. And while they're surely not straightedge, they certainly don't play drunk. And yet, if there's one band they remind me of, it's the Replacements. Matter Magazine's Liz Phillip once wrote of the Replacements, "they proved that those who missed the 60's could still build something great on the crass and hollow corpse of 70's music." Miracle Of 86 may have missed the glory days of 80's indie rock, but they're building something memorable on the bloated, wasted cadaver of genre-fied and commercialized 90's punk.

Color me impressed.

Kevin Devine – vocals, guitar
Mike Robertson – guitar, vocals
Chris McAllen – bass
Mike Skinner – drums, vocals

Q: Give me the 5-minute history of the band.

Kevin: Chris (bass) and I started playing together about five or six years ago, when we were sophomores in high school. Mike came along when we were in college, and then we went through a stage where we had a couple of revolving door drummers. Then we finally found Mike and that's when it all came together.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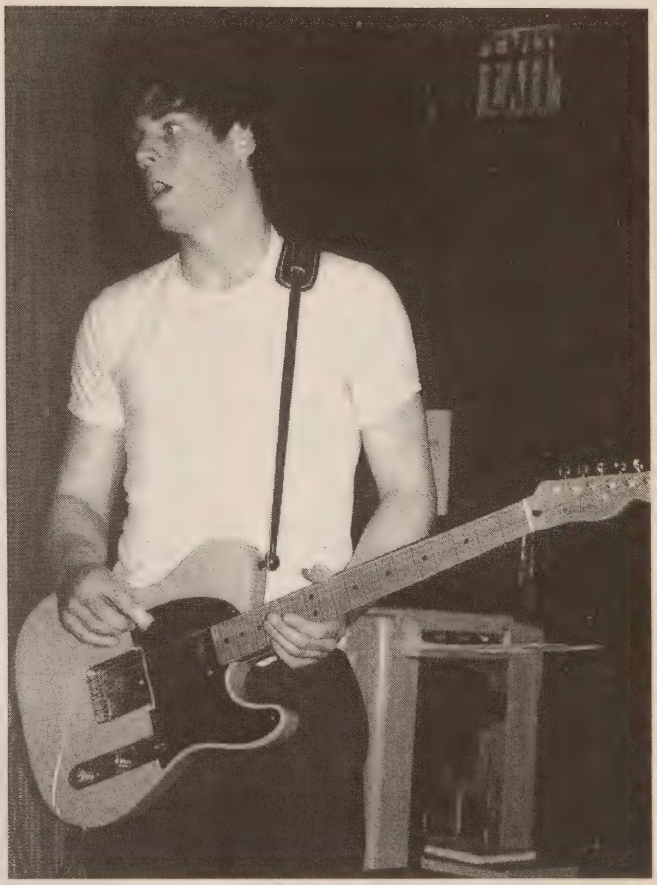


Mike Robertson (photos by Jim Testa)

Mike R: The first seven years don't count. We've really only been a band since we got Mike.

Q: You called it something else originally, right?

Kevin: "Delusion." I was 13 years old, I thought that was a sick name for a band. We became Miracle of 86 somewhere around the middle of my senior year of high school. No wait, we recorded for one of those Emo Diary compilations on Deep Elm my freshman year of college and we changed the name for that. So that was about 5 years ago.

Q: That long? I don't think most people realize you've been a band for 5 years.

Kevin: You know, I don't think we ever played a show outside of New York until… we were predominantly a Staten Island band, we almost never played off Staten Island until Mike came along. We were totally isolated. I think the first time we played Manhattan was the Mercury Lounge in January, 1998.

Q: Chris, have you always played bass, or did you start on the guitar? The bass player has the stereotype of being the great underachiever of rock n roll. What do you like about the bass and what do you think you bring to Miracle of 86's sound and style?

Chris: Actually I started out playing the flute. My mom was dead set on me not being in a rock band. Then when I was in high school I got an acoustic guitar. I totally sucked. These kids in my class needed a bass player for their band and I lied about being able to play to them. As soon as I started playing bass, I liked it so much more than guitar. Ffor one it was way easier, and I also liked the tone a lot more. Then I met Kevin and he needed a bass player, and that's about it. As far as what my bass playing adds to the band, I really don't know. It's just fucking awesome.

Q: Has the band changed significantly in terms of what you sound like since it began?

Kevin: I think it sounds a lot different now than it did just two years ago. On the new record, there's definitely a lot more going on.

Q: Mike (Robertson), when did you come into the picture?

Mike R: I guess it was about two and a half years ago. We were in college. I just started screwing around with Kevin on some of the songs and it started sounding good so I started playing with them.

Q: I think the perception out there – I know that I had it – was that you guys were a relatively new band. I don't think a lot of people know you've been doing this for five or six years.

Kevin: Well, that's fine as far as I'm concerned. I'd rather have them think that. I'm a lot prouder of this new record. And I think the band today is a lot better than it was when our first record came out.

Q: In the last year, anyway, you've had a lot of really high-profile gigs in some pretty big rooms around the city. Do you book yourselves or do you have someone helping you?

Kevin: No, we completely book ourselves. We would love to have a booking agent, especially for touring. At least in my experience, it's a real pain in the ass when you book your own tours, although we've done really well on our tours.

Mike Skinner: But it's starting to get hectic. We played Boston last Saturday, we're playing Brooklyn today, and we're playing Providence tomorrow night. And if we had someone doing the booking for us, it probably would have all been in a straight line, instead of doing it in a spiral like this.

Mike Robertson: I think the last year has been a big change because it's only been a year since we've had a really solid drummer. For months before that, we were always in a position where we were either looking for a new drummer because we didn't like the one we had, or we had just gotten rid of our old drummer. Am I right?

Kevin: We had about four drummers in a year before Mike came along, and since we've had him, it's just been full speed ahead.

Q: One of the things you guys do well is juggle the all-ages scene with the 21+ club scene. Is that something you do by intent? Because it seems a lot of bands either play one or the other, not both.

Kevin: I think it's harder now because there are so few all-ages venues left. Brownies used to do 16+, Wetlands used to do them, Coney Island High... There's really nowhere in the city except Northsix right now that will do all ages shows.

Mike S.: Well, we did those Bowery shows...

Mike R.: The Bowery Ballroom is 18+ but the Mercury Lounge is always 21+. That's what the Punk Temple is so great. It's true all ages.

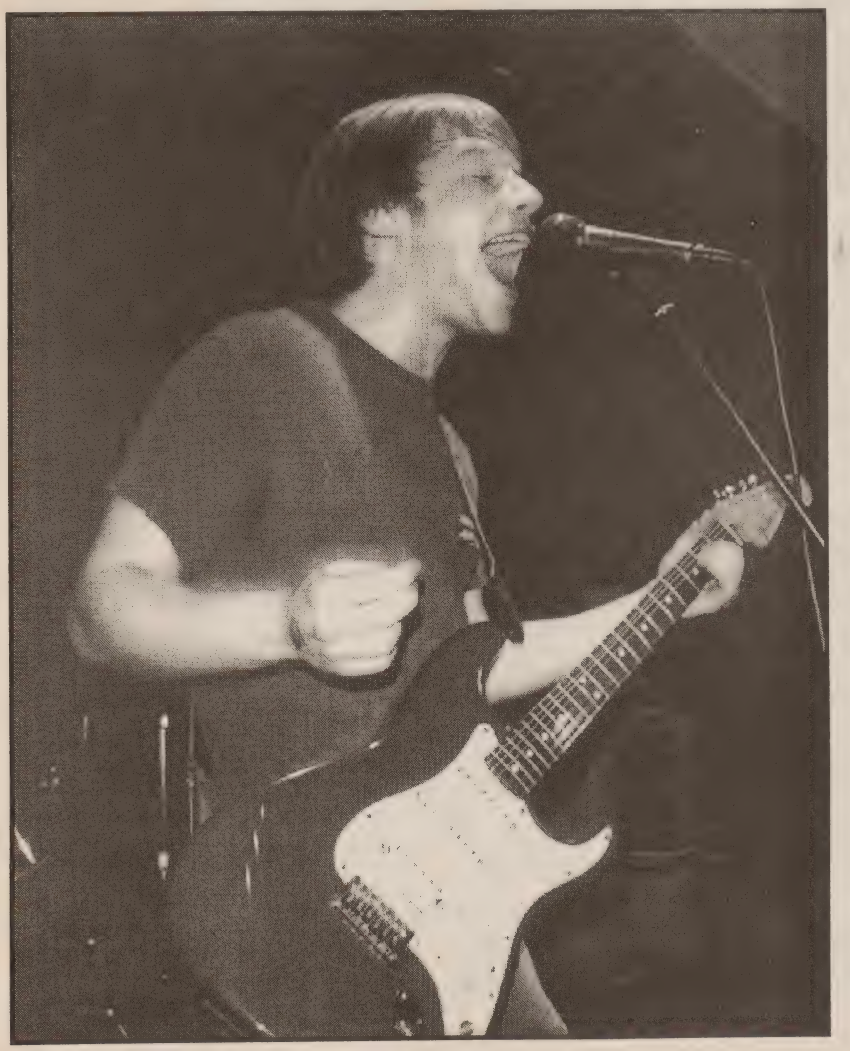
Kevin: We just like to play a lot. We'll play if it's all ages and we'll play if it's 21+. We'd like it if more places would do all ages shows. I know that I used to like to go to shows when I was 14.

Q: Would you agree that with an all-ages show, you're going to get a much more enthusiastic response, and you'll sell way more merch? But with a Bowery Ballroom show, you're building credibility as a band with the industry and labels and what not.

Kevin: I think that's true in a sense, but also, unfortunately, a lot of the bands that I'd like to play with are playing the 21+ shows. So I like to play all ages shows, but I also know that there are certain bands that I'm only going to get to play with at a place like the Mercury Lounge. I think that's really at the heart of it.

Mike S: I don't think it's something we keep count of. It's not like we'll say, okay, we've played this many 21+ shows, now it's time to do an all ages show. We just take them as they come up. The other thing with the all-ages shows is that usually you just do it really fast, you just throw your stuff up on stage and play, and there's all this energy, which is great. But when you play the Bowery or the Mercury, you get to do a soundcheck, you get to take your time. You play different material. It's almost like a different experience.

Mike Skinner **(Photo by Robert Francos)**



Kevin Devine **(photo by Jim Testa)**

Kevin: I definitely think you're right, though, it's more fun playing for the kids. They don't take it for granted yet. I think, living in New York, by the time you're 21, if you're into this kind of music, you've already seen 500 shows. Whereas if you're just a little kid, it's all still very new to you. And the enthusiasm is still there.

Q: It's just coincidental that Mike came along in the last year or so and helped you transform yourselves from a Staten Island to a NYC band, since it's been a pretty good year for NYC bands. Have you been aware of that at all?

Kevin: I don't know that we get any windfall from that at all, because I don't think we have a whole hell of a lot to do with what's being associated as a "New York band" right now. Just the type of music we play, the way we look. As far as those bands like the Strokes or whatever, to each his own, but I don't really feel that's what this band is about.

Mike R: I've been aware of that New York thing that's happening but it doesn't feel like it's happening to us.

Mike S: I feel we get left out of a lot of the "New York band" stuff because of the emo tag that sticks with our band. Because the cool New York bands don't want anything to do with that. Whether we sound like that today or not. It's just there, and there are enough emo names in our presskit, bands we've toured with or played with, that people are going to make that connection whether it's true or not. They're going to look at that stuff and go, Oh, that's not cool.

Q: Since you brought up the "E" word, it seems like every interview in this issue brings up the same two things: Why aren't you like the Strokes, and why aren't you emo? Now, one of my definitions is that emo is one of the only kinds of music that isn't influenced by anything but itself. Now, you guys, especially on the new record, there are some country influences on there, you're working with a lot of classic rock influences, so right there, that blows you out of the emo category to me. On the other hand, that stuff is really popular with the kids, and you can't deny that you've ridden that wave to some extent.

Kevin: I would something of an asshole to say that it's total bullshit to call us emo. I mean, we made did a track on a compilation called *The Emo Diaries.* So you know people are going to process that. But just because you did something at 18, does it still fit you when you're 23? I'm not nuts, I know a song like "Dance Dance Revolution" is a cousin at some point to something by a band like Jimmy Eat World. But there are other songs on the album that are very different, more upbeat, and sound nothing like what those bands sound like. So people are going to call you whatever the hell they're going to call you anyway. The only unfortunate thing is when someone decides they're not going to like us because it's emo before you even listen to it. But I've seen people come to a show with that attitude and leave totally changed. Once they've seen us, they don't say we're emo as readily.

Mike R: We really play that indie-rock college stuff.

Mike S: It seems to me that you could take any kind of music from the past and if you put it out now, people would say it's emo. It doesn't even matter what it sounds like, some people are going to call it emo.

Q: The notion that only one kind of music has emotion to it is so absurd anyway…

Kevin: I think the word really doesn't even have much to do with music anymore, it's more about the dress code and behavior and who your friends are and what shows you go to. Like emo boys are supposed to be kind of reticent and fey, and if you're a girl, you're supposed to want that kind of boy for your boyfriend. When I hear the word emo now, I don't even think about music, I think more about what the kids at the shows are going to look like.

Q: You can't help but notice the emo kids at shows. I think the one thing about NYC is that there are so many kids in the area, and so few all-ages shows, that you get a mix all the time anyway, both bands and audience. Which I think is good for everybody.

Kevin: I think shows are always better when there's some variety. I love hearing someone who plays acoustic guitar and sings, but I hate sitting through four of those people in a row. Same thing goes for bands. If you watch four bands who all sound exactly like Jimmy Eat World or any of those pop emo bands, it gets boring. So I think it's good when they mix it up.

Q: So let's talk about the record quickly. It's coming out on…

Kevin: Lakeshore Records

Q: Which I assume is a small label, since I haven't heard of it.

Kevin: They're an indie and they're affiliated with this film production company. They did the first Queens Of The Stone Age record and the Granddaddy record. I don't think they've had a real breakout record yet, but at this point, for us, they're really good people and we're really happy.

Mike S: Some of the films they've put out have been really cool, and they put out the new Meat Beat Manifesto record, which totally pushed me into wanting to sign with them.

Q: I can't believe you haven't had at least some nibble of interest from a major label yet, and I'm sure you've talked about signing to a major. What are your feelings about that?

Kevin: We don't sit down and have formal conversations like that, but we just do our decision making as it presents itself.

Mike R: I think the decision to sign with Lakeshore was very intentional, because it's a one-record deal, which was beautiful. We really liked the idea that a label would get behind us and give us a push for just this one record, and not own us for the rest of our lives. It was really really cool.

Mike S: And also, Kevin does his solo stuff, and they were cool with that. They were just really accommodating. I just think a band is more comfortable when there are less constrictions on what you can do. I think the leverage gets so out of whack when you sign a major label deal… if a certain person doesn't like the first record, well then maybe they just won't let you release another record, ever. And I think it can destroy the chemistry inside a band too. Like if one person in the band really wants to sign the deal, and another is really hesitant, then when something goes wrong, that person says it's the other person's fault. Or if somebody at the label gets fired…

Q: That never happens. (laughs)

Mike S: Yeah, that never happens. When you sign with a major label, you have to remember that you're not signing with a person, you're signing with a corporation. And that person can be gone the minute you get signed.

Kevin: The thing we have to ask ourselves is could a band like us ever really, really catch on? I could see it if we were a little more aggressive, but for what we're doing? It does happen, but it's pretty phenomenal when it does.

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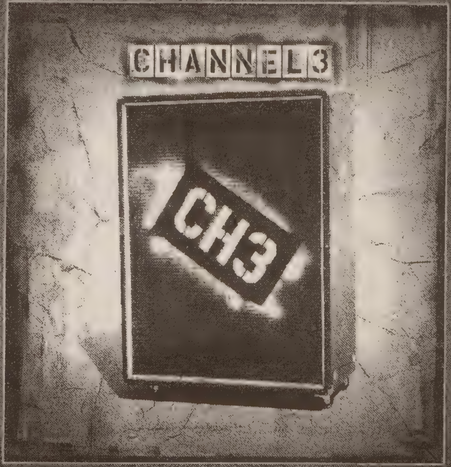

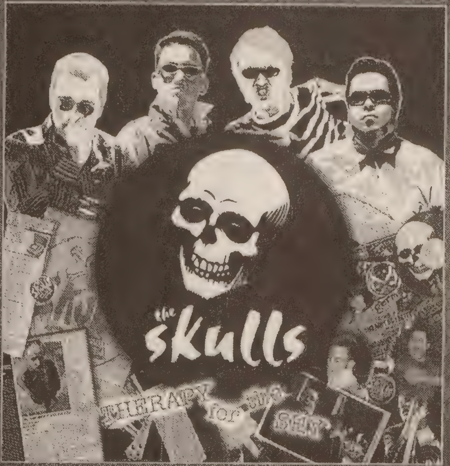

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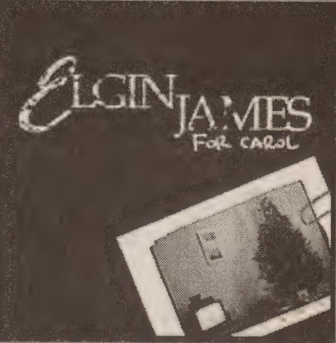
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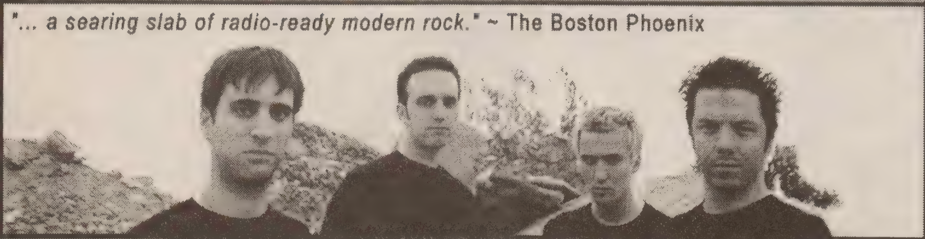
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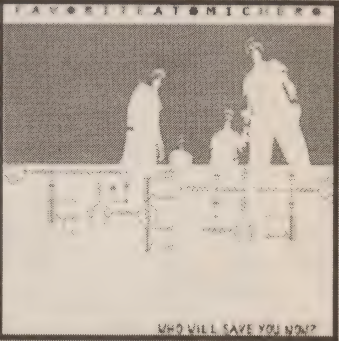
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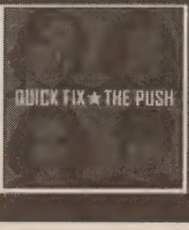
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Q: I get the feeling that you guys listen to a lot of different music. What kind of stuff do you listen to the van on tour, and what do you hate listening to that another guy always wants to hear?

Kevin: There's actually very little I don't like to hear that the other guys want to put on. You obviously like some things more than others but it's extremely rare I'll hear something and be like, "Oh fuck this, shut this shit off." I think by and large everyone in the band has pretty good musical taste. I know for a fact that the others won't say the same about me, or at least one thing I like - no Conor Oberst for Chris especially and generally for Mike too. So I try to tone it down because I love that kid's shit - listen to it while they're sleeping or something. Skinner and McAllen also don't like Dylan, and Mike and I love that.

Chris: I always forget to bring CD's with me on tour or any of that shit and if I do it's only like 2 or 3 as I'm leaving the house. I usually bring some sort of Wu-Yang with me or some mix tape. At home, I listen to pretty much what I've always listened to: Nirvana, the Pixies, Sonic Youth, Kiss, the Misfits, the Ramones, Black Flag, Husker Du, etc. The two things I absolutely can't get down with that get played in the van occasionally are Bright Eyes and Bob Dylan.

Q: Mof86 seems like a really tight-knit group but even best friends fight sometimes. What do you guys fight about the most? And who usually wins?

Kevin: I think we argue the most about Bright Eyes. I dunno, I actually think our band has an odd tension thing where we never really fight, we either just let things go or say obnoxious shit off the top of our heads or build it up until an actual 'talk' has to get had, which is rare. I consider the three guys to be three of my closest friends so I guess this is either a really good approach or one that could eventually be bad. We've had arguments in the past about the direction of the band and approaches to recording songs and shit that all bands fight about. Overall I think we do a real good job getting over things and keeping shit in perspective.

Chris: We don't fight much at all and when we do, no one wins, it usually ends in a compromise.

Q: The new CD has a couple of songs that have a very definite country twang to them. What sort of influences brought that sound into the band? After all, you're all city boys. I've noticed that some kids (although certainly not all of them) at all-ages shows don't always react well to the countryish songs. Is there anything you'd like to say to those kids?

Kevin: For me, I guess it's primarily an Elliott Smith/Dylan/Wilco influence and to a lesser extent some of the Pavement stuff, some Hank Williams stuff, some modern indie-folk stuff. Some Pedro the Lion stuff has that twang to it, a couple of records back. I've been writing a lot like that lately, it just sounds nice to me. Songs like "Call off the Cops" and "Sleep All Damn Day," it just seemed to work so well in that style. I think those songs are still indie-rock songs just approached a little less straight, a little less step on the distortion pedal and thunder roll on the toms or whatever. I really like the way that music feels and I think you can do really interesting things with it when you come at it from someplace a little different. And it's fun as hell to play. As for kids not liking those songs as much at all ages shows, I totally get that. They're 14 and want to rock out and jump around and go nuts. I'm not going to hold a grudge if a kid wants to hear "Every Famous Last Word" more thn "Call off the Cops." But I'm also not going to stop playing songs I love because you can't mosh to them. So it doesn't really make much of an impact on me at all.

Chris: We listened to a lot of Wilco while we toured Canada, and Kevin and Robertson like a lot of country sounding stuff. I like some country stuff like Cash and Willy Nelson and shit, but it's not really my favorite stuff in the world so I can kinda identify with the kids who might not like it. It's just like any other genre: some of it's cool, but most of it sucks.

Mike R.: When I first starting to learn the guitar, my teacher was heavily into country, folk, and blues. He turned me on to Woody Guthrie, Robert Johnson, etc. So it very much influenced my playing. Although I rarely sit around and listen to real country music or the blues, the majority of the rock and roll I listen to is directly influenced by it (Bob Dylan, The Rolling Stones, The Band, etc). As for the kids, I can understand where they are coming from. I remember when my guitar teacher was trying to show me Bob Dylan songs when I was fifteen, all I wanted to learn was Rage Against the Machine riffs.

Q: So 2003, what do we look for from Miracle Of 86?

Kevin: We're going to try and tour as much as we can. We're playing SXSW, which is a big deal for us. We'd like to do extensive touring but we're not really sure if this is the record that will take us to the point, or how much we'll be able to afford being away from home without making any money.

Mike R: Booking agencies so far have been the hardest nut for us to crack. That's been the one thing that's held us back.

Mike S: We all work so we can't just go off for weeks at a time whenever we want. So no booking agency is going to look at us and see a band that can make them a lot of money. And to get someone to do booking for us… it's such a hard job, it's such a lot of work… and then there's no money. All we can give them is a percentage of nothing.

Q: Finally… you're been covering "Born To Run" lately with Robertson on lead vocals, and he sings a song on the new album that sounds like it was heavily Springsteen influenced. But everybody knows that Bruce Springsteen is not punk. What's up with Robertson and this Springsteen thing?

Mike R.: I'm going to try and wrap this up in less than 250 words. I've been waiting for someone to ask me this question my whole life. The first album I ever bought by Springsteen was *Born In The USA*. I was 6 years old. I think a lot of people my age disregard him because their first and strongest impression of him is "Dancing in the Dark." But, for me, his first five or six albums represent everything rock and roll promises to be. He makes rock and roll magical and romantic without making it corny. Rather than being jaded or angst-ridden, it's hopeful. It's innocent and exciting. And at the same time, it isn't silly or immature. I think that is missing in a lot of the music that is coming out today. I'm going to stop here because this could get out of hand.

Mike S.: The funny thing is that until I met Robertson I really hated The Boss because, in general, I just don't like the people who introduced me to his music. But playing "Born To Run" has been cool because I realized that Springsteen has written some really good music over the years. I think he's funny (The Boss) because he has this image of being so anti-corporate when all the inside stuff I've heard is about him shopping for the perfectly dirty jeans for hours; but that's true of most big rock stars. I like that he plays for a few hours every night, which isn't something many people can say, including us. I won't say he's my new favorite, but the good thing about being in a band is that I'm forced to consider that maybe I'm wrong about things. That's a good way to live life. Maybe George W. should think about that. Maybe we all should.

For merch, tour dates, and Mike Skinner's home phone number, visit www.miracleof86.com

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The Ataris are:
Kris Roe: vocals, guitar
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John Collura: guitar/vocals
Chris "Kid" Knapp: drums

If Green Day and The Offspring represent the first wave of punk to leap into the mainstream, The Ataris could be lumped into punk's second wave, making the leap from basement shows and Warped Tour sets to a major-label deal with Sony on the coattails of MTV-blessed bands like Blink-182 and Sum 41. Whatever you think of the politics of a "punk" band going major label, at least The Ataris have paid some dues. On the strength of some really catchy songs and a powerful stage presence, the band exploded out of its modest DIY roots to become a major force on the underground touring circuit, with several albums released on Fat Wreck and Kung Fu Records. Also to their credit, The Ataris have one of the coolest and most fan-friendly websites you'll ever see for a major label band, filled with photos of the guys posing with punk-rock legends like Fat Mike, the Riverdales, and Jawbreaker. So while our smart-alecky cub reporter Oliver Lyons takes a couple of swipes at the guys in this interview, give the Ataris props for where they've been and congratulations for where they're going. – Jim Testa

the ataris
So long, Astoria; hello, MTV

Interview by Oliver Lyons
Photos courtesy of the band

Q: First things first; you guys are now signed to Columbia Records home to such musical luminaries as Evan and Jaron, John Mayer and Stereomud. As bona fide "major label stars," I have to ask you one thing: Are the drugs and women better on a major label or a punk label?

KR: Sorry I can't answer this question at present time as I am currently involved in a three-way with Destiny's Child... as for the drugs, maybe you should ask Aerosmith or Bob Dylan.

Q: Secondly; since you guys are rolling in major label dough, can I get a free shirt?

KR: I would mail you one right away but I am too busy bathing in all my money at the moment so you'll just have to take a number.

Q: In all seriousness, are you receiving much flak for signing to a major? If you are, make sure to note to your aggressors that you literally covered your ass by covering "Boxcar" by Jawbreaker on your first album, *Anywhere But Here*. Actually, that song was an interesting choice for a cover. Was it always in the back of your minds that one day you would move beyond the realm of the "punk scene?"

KR: I don't think people really care what label anyone is on anymore. I mean Honestly, The Clash, the Ramones, etc. were all on major labels. The biggest indie labels today are either partly owned (or at least distributed by) major labels. Most of all, I think everyone realizes that we have not only spent the last six years travelling across hell and back in a shitty van on tours that we booked ourselves, but that we do everything in our power and always will to make sure that our band is a self-sufficient operation. This means reading and personally responding to all of our fan mail, running our own website, designing and printing our own merchandise, playing only all-ages venues, opening a record store so that we could help put on non-profit shows as well as turn people on to bands that were important to us when we were growing up. I think that if the music is good, the label it is on is irrelevant.

Q: Two part question. Since you will now be joining such bands as Saves The Day, New Found Glory, Thursday, etc - all of whom are punk bands that got their start on indie labels I was wondering what are your opinions of these groups and do you feel solidarity amongst them having all started at an underground level? Also, the above mentioned bands' music is defined in popular terms as "punk." Do you feel that's accurate? Do you feel the music you play is punk and do you think you can even define punk by an archetype set all the way back in 1976? Do you think you should?

KR: I feel that if you do decide to go to a major label, there is a large amount of groundwork you should do before making this decision. I feel that these bands are all extremely hard workers and have done their share of roughing it as we have and deserve every bit of success. I feel that the word "Punk" is thrown around too loosely. To me, punk is all about doing your own thing regardless of what anyone else may think of you. Punk is about individuality. I think the whole contradiction of it is that many times, the person who is overly concerned with what is punk or not is the one who ends up being the biggest conformist and the most narrow minded. Just be yourself, listen to the music you want, wear what you want to wear. Who fucking cares? The politics of it all is completely ignorant, hence we chose to cover "Boxcar" to answer your above question. Buy (Jawbreaker's) *24 Hour Revenge Therapy* and read the lyrics to that song if anyone missed the point.

Q: Now this is all secondhand information but I've heard somewhere along the grapevine that Columbia Records is refraining from calling you guys a "punk" band in any press and is referring to you instead as a "modern rock" outfit? Care to comment?

KR: We are a rock band. I feel that operating on a do-it-yourself level and playing extremely energetic live shows are the only two somewhat "punk" things about us. We do our own thing, we like to keep people guessing on what we will do next, and we have no limits on what we can do. I feel a lot of so-called "punk" bands do have some boundaries. Our goal is to not limit ourselves, to speak to a wide audience.

Q: Your new album *So Long, Astoria* is a sizeable departure from your early material. It's less smart-ass and more reflective. I described the album to my friend as "most bands sing about trying to get that girl in biology class to notice them, but the new Ataris album is more like, "hey, remember that time I tried to get that girl in biology class to notice me? That was good times!" Was this progression planned or was simply a product of growing older?

KR: I am 26 years old. I am not interested in teen angst. My goal as a songwriter is to write my personal stories that someone could possibly get some sort of positive message out of. Every song on this record is very in-depth and my goal is to put the listener in my shoes, at the exact moment I was in when I wrote the song. I would also hope that they can get something positive from them in the same way that so many songs have done for me.

Q: I must give you guys props on your cover of Don Henley's "Boys of Summer." That song doesn't get enough credit. It's a great song and fits in very well with the feel of your new album. But every time I hear that song it bums the hell out of me. Same way with *Time After Time.* It's one of those songs that ruin your whole day. Has Henley heard your version?

KR: Thanks. Every summer I used to go down to Florida and visit my grandparents. I remember being down there during the summer when this song was huge on the radio. Every time I hear it now it reminds me of these awesome pink sunsets in Florida, travelling out of state for the first time and feeling like a young Holden Caulfield or something...everything just seemed so clear and so important at that moment.

Q: On your new album you have a song called "Summer of '79." Now looking at a picture of the band, it appears none of you can be older than twenty-seven. What gives? You guys would have been, at best, six years old in 1979. How could that be the best summer of your lives? Did you go to a real kick-ass day camp that year or something?

KB: All of us, except for our bass player, are under 30. The song is basically me writing about myself as if I was there in the summer in 1979, driving around singing Queen songs and just having great times with friends in a more care free time.

Q: I'm to understand that you guys own a record shop in California. Did you open it before the major label moolah came in, or is it a recent endeavor set up as a front to cover up the bass player's illegal coke dealings and serves only as a middleman to launder money from Columbia Records to Colombia the country in order to ward off potential hits from one of many South American drug lords you guys have crossed in your travels? You can be honest with me. I'm a professional journalist.

KR: Our old rehearsal space in Santa Barbara was going to be torn down to make way for ocean front hotels. We searched hard around town to find a new place to rehearse and the only thing we could come across had a small retail space with a tiny apartment in the back. So our bass player Mike and I came up with the idea of opening up a record store in the front, and converting the back into to a rehearsal room with a small storage space for all of our merch. We rent the space, and we hold non-profit shows. Most of all, our goal is to give something back to our community while turning people on to music that we feel is important, and have a space where our fans can come meet us and even watch us rehearse. Our goal is to be on as personal of a level with our fans as possible. We make very little to no profit whatsoever.

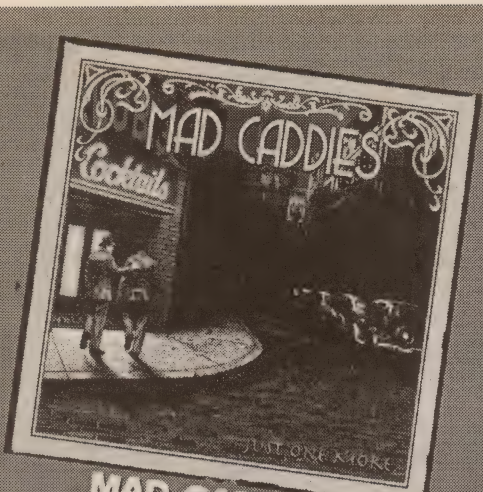
Q: Finally, you guys are now officially "rock stars." You're on major tours in a major bus playing major shows and essentially living the "good life." What are your plans, now that you have carte blanche? Also, what do you think you guys will be doing when the band finally ends?

KR: We have worked very hard to get to where we are today. We didn't get to this point overnight. We signed a very modest deal and honestly had bigger offers from a few different indie labels, but we chose Columbia because as a band we want to reach as many people as possible. To me, music is not an elitist art form. Everyone in this world deserves an equal chance to hear our music. Growing up in a small town in Indiana, I know what it is like to not have good indie stores to buy my records at or to have to drive three fucking hours to Chicago to see a band (unless you were 21). We are the same band today as we have always been and our label would never have any intention of changing that. When we recorded our recent record, our label said, "Take your time and make the record you want to make." It was great to not have to rush right off tour and into the studio to have three weeks total to finishing writing, rehearsing for and recording a record. This was a perk of being on Columbia. We don't take toursupport because we are a self sufficient band from touring, we don't have buckets of money coming in and if we ever do, it's because we earned it. Talk to us after our record has been out a year and maybe we will have some money, and I would be the first person to share it with all the people that I care about. I am happily married and I have no time for drugs as I am too busy living out my dream of playing music. I feel very honored that I get the chance to do so. As for what I will be doing when this band finally ends... I think I'll become a journalist.

Q: Any final words...

KR: "I was passing out, while you were passing out your rules." -Blake Schwarzenbach

Visit the Ataris online at www.theataris.com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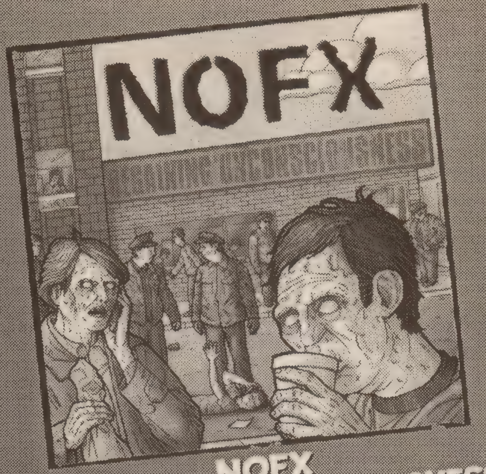
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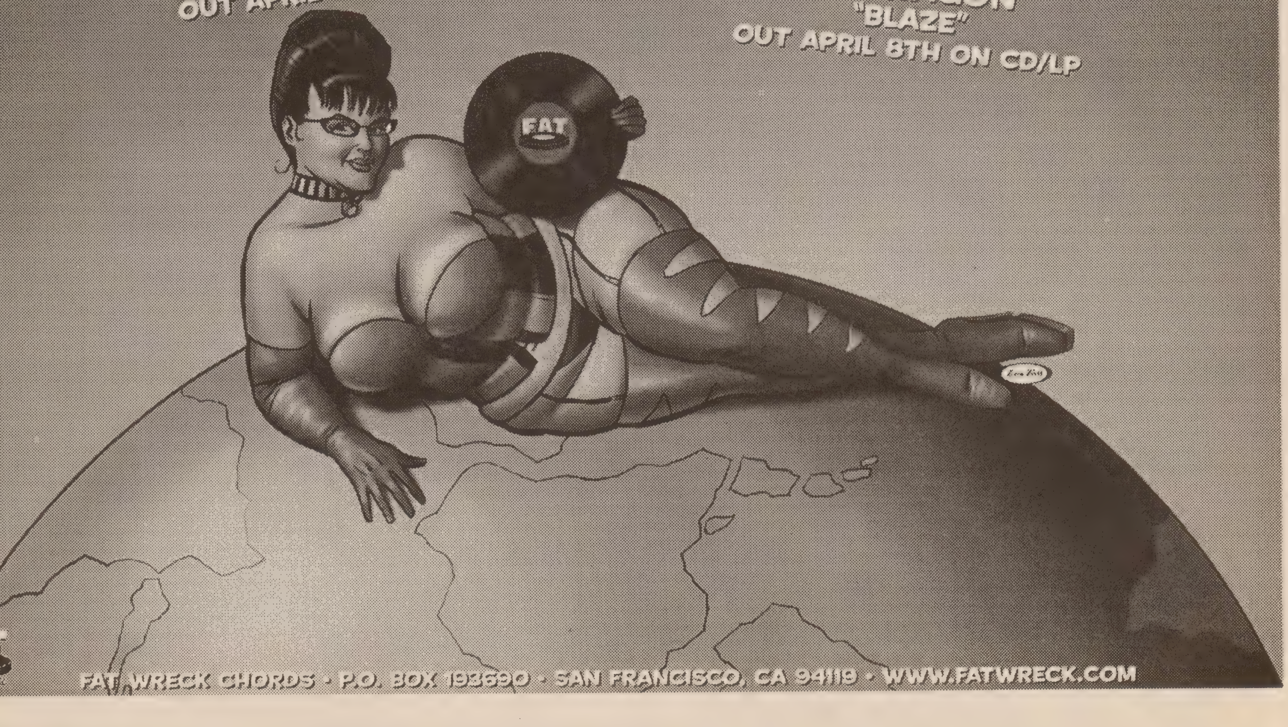

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VAN HALEN
moog

THE SWIMMIES

it's not the vehicle; it's the destination

By Tris McCall

The Swimmies are the world's foremost Japanese Queen cover band. No, seriously, that's what their website says! Oh, that Carla Parisi -- always wising off, deflecting, making up stories, dodging close inspection. But then it would take a woman with a runaway imagination to front an act as elusive as the Swimmies, Bloomfield New Jersey's mad scientists, busy fusing indiepop with lounge music, jazz, and analog synthesizer meltdown noises. After playing a run of truly astonishing gigs throughout the NYC metro area over the past few years, the trio is finally recording their debut full-length CD. Expectations among locals, weirdos and intellectuals -- and particularly local weirdo intellectuals -- could not be higher.

Carla Parisi – vocals, guitar, synths
Mike Weintraub – bass
Eric Peters - drums

Q: Carla, you take such an intuitive approach to the Moog that some have surmised that you just found it in the attic one day and proceeded to play it. I think you're probably more trained, or at least experienced, than that. What's your synth history? How long have you had this one, and did you play any other synthesizers previously?

Carla: I wanted to make all those great Stereolab space noises, so I picked up the Micromoog five years ago. It's the only analog synth I have. For what it's worth, I now own Macy Gray's red Farfisa, but I need to take a blow torch to it. As for "training," early on my mother began transforming my sister and me into Van Parisi. At 8 years-old I started using a Casiotone on top of a church organ for drum beats and played the wackiest versions ever of "Wind Beneath My Wings" and "She's a Maniac." I had bass pedals like Geddy Lee. Around the holidays my family would nag until I agreed to play for them, and when I hit the first note they would talk incessantly and ignore me. My organ teacher and I recorded a tape of those tunes and I gave them out as presents. I should dig them out of the archives. I bet they're genius. But anyway, that's my keyboard history. I'm a total intuitive player. The whole band is, really. None of us have set parts for our songs and I know that sounds totally lazy, but why set limits? Sure, sometimes my parts are a complete trainwreck, but other times they come out better than I originally intended. Mistakes and all, spontaneity keeps the band fun and human.

Q: Michael, what the Swimmies rhythm section plays is often very close to jazz. Do you consider yourself a jazz player? Do you consider the Swimmies something of a jazz act?

Mike Weintraub (Bass): Sure, why not? What we could be is the "new fusion". In the Seventies, it was considered a good thing to mix influences. In the Eighties, it was suddenly taboo. In the Nineties, we saw the re-emergence of "lounge music". The same people who liked that also seemed to like the whole indie rock thing. So, voila! Les Swimmies.... I feel like I'm on "Inside The Actor's Studio."

Q: Give me a short history of the project. Where are you guys from, how do you know each other? When did the group form, and what (honestly, now) was your ambition for it? Have you fulfilled that ambition?

Eric Peters (Drums): Ambition?

Carla: Ok, I'll try to make this relatively painless. I'm from Bloomingdale, NJ. *Weird NJ* did an article on the town saying we had the "Most Weirdos Per Square Mile." I actually know "The Walker" and "Lump Man." In college, I placed an ad in the *Aquarian* for a bass player and two people called -- one asked for oral favors and the other was Michael. Ernie Intorrella grew up with Michael in Fair Lawn, so he offered to play drums with us. We were psyched. We love Ernie, EJ Beats, whatever. When he left to tour with Plug Spark Sanjay (then later, the Rosario Focus), I called up Eric, one of my favorite drummers and people on the planet. He's a drum teacher in the city, so we were hoping to snag one of his students, but totally lucked out when he wanted to join. When I gave him a CD of our songs he transcribed the drum parts on staff paper and it was all laid out neatly on a music stand. It freaked us out. Eric is class all the way. Oh, he came to NYC by way of Binghamton, NY.

Eric: I wanted to play music in a place where we're not all sharing the same bass player.

Carla: As for my ambition, ever since I picked up an instrument, it's always been to create something with a genuine heartbeat.

Q: Carla, your lyrics frequently express a sense of impending danger that hovers over tranquil -- sometimes childlike -- scenes. What's that big truck that seems to be coming around the bend for the narrators of your songs?

Carla: You're pretty right on. It's a bizarre childhood memory, so I'll try to make sense of it. When I was 6 I got my first album, *Stay Hungry* by Twisted Sister. The 5th grade Safety Patrol on my school bus would play it incessantly on our route home. I loved it so much, I convinced the parents to buy it for me. That was very cool of them, considering Dee Snyder was eating a fleshy cow bone on the album cover. For hours on end, I would ride around the basement on my Big Wheels like a mental patient, listening to that record on my Fisher Price cassette player. The "Big Truck" in the song probably means "daydreaming" or something. I think.

Q: Tell me a little bit about the upcoming full-length record. When will it be out, and what will it sound like? Is it an attempt to capture the experience of seeing the Swimmies live, or is it more studio-crafted?

Eric: It will be a combination of both with very little engineering expertise.

Carla: We're treating it like an art project, with 5 or 6 songs thrown in for good measure. Eric just bought a 1-inch tape machine, so now we're officially "self contained" and able to work at our own pace. The album will be out sooner rather than later and will have the same spirit as the live show. We have a drawer full of cassette tapes from past rehearsals, lots of improv stuff that we'd like to include. Right now, we're in the middle of re-listening and logging tapes, writing, just being ourselves. Michael likes to point that we're probably the only band that doesn't play our own songs at rehearsal. Once the first record is out we'll hit a momentum and release enough EP's to complete fill our closets and the trunk of my car. But seriously, we're in the middle of starting Plantlife Records. At the moment, it's more of a collective than a label, but soon I'll have more time to help get it off the ground. Our first release is an instrumental jazz record, *Two Trees* by bassist Paul Engle. Paul wrote an amazing collection of "jazz lullabies" for his little daughter. It's way out-there and the musicanship is incredible. Paul, our Eric, and Dena Derose grew up together in Binghamton and toured the country together for years, so this is their big reunion album. Dena is a fantastic keyboard player/vocalist well known in the jazz world. The three of them can play a jazz/fusion version of the "Dark Side of the Moon" album. Anyway, the second release will be Los Swimmies.

Q: One of the most remarkable things about the Swimmies EP I've got is that none of the atonal or off-kilter synth was mixed down or edited out. Do you think of yourselves as a courageous act? Do you consciously suppress the urge to edit or clean up what you do? What's the significance of the aggressive moog for you?

Carla: The moog parts were just me being me at that particular time. The tape started rolling and that's the way the knobs fell.

Eric: That stuff was left in? We thought someone else would take care of it. It's a sad commentary on our times that being ourselves and having fun should be considered courageous.

Q: I can't help noticing you've got a much more expansive chord vocabulary than other indie groups. I know you dig Motley Crüe -- what else do you listen to? Where are those great guitar chords coming from?

Carla: Wow, thanks for noticing. I'm a firm believer in taking lessons and I'm completely not self-taught. The chords I use are colorful substitutions for I, IV, V, ii, vi, whatever. I just add major 7ths, 9ths, minor 6ths, and anything else to the triads. It's "instant lounge" and more pleasant sounding to me. Oh, I'm sure I sound like an ass right now, but it's all good. I have a music degree from William Paterson where I studied classical guitar -- not like that adds any legitimacy to what I play, but I'm proud it. If I'm looking for new chord ideas, I'll transcribe songs by Mancini, Burt Bacharach, Antonio Carlos Jobim. If you're going to borrow, do it from the greats. I know Eric takes drum parts from Tony Williams and Michael plays the occasional Rudy Sarzo pentatonic riff. I listen to a ton of different music. There's a lot of history I need to catch up on. Some of the most beautiful music ever was recorded by Astrud Gilberto, Stan Getz, Walter Wanderly, Jobim....the bossa nova cats. Other things that always seem to find their way back to my CD player are Ella Fitzgerald, Mingus, Chet Atkins, Miles, Thelonious Monk, Dolly Parton, Bacharach, Billie Holiday, Iron Maiden, Johnny Cash, lots of Bach, Chopin, and the Velvet Underground. More recently, the Flaming Lips, Belle & Sebastain, and Radiohead. It all depends on my mood, the time of the day, where I'm driving to. Oh, the Motley Crue thing? I'll always hold a special place in my heart for the metal. It's my way of fighting adulthood

Q: Do you consider yourselves part of a Jersey scene? If so, can you assess that scene, and your place in it, for me? Do you, as many intellectual/experimental Jersey bands do, feel more comfortable in NYC than in your home state?

Carla: We're glad to be part of the Jersey scene and always have a blast when we play in town. It could be so much worse. Instead of sharing the stage with The Rosario Focus, Particle Zoo, and Val Emmich, it could easily be Dogvoices, Good Girls Don't, and the Jimmy Buffet cover band that plays at the Junkyard every Tuesday at 10pm. Not like I've ever seen them or anything.

Eric: We feel most comfortable playing in our own studio by ourselves, but any place with our friends, good strangers and beer is nice.

Q: Do you feel you've encountered any prejudices because you're a female-fronted act?

CP: No, not at all. Everyone I've met along the way has been really sweet. No one's ever screamed "show me your tits!" Sometimes my amp even gets carried for me. Last summer I saw Dolly Parton and was impressed by the way she manhandled the crowd. For obvious reasons, there was a lot of hooting and hollering and she was all like, "Honey, meet me in the back of the bus after the show!" I took notes.

Eric: We're actually male fronted act but we set up sideways. Mike's just quieter than most lead singers.

Q: Carla, in performance you're famous for clapping and cheering for yourself after songs. ("Yay!") Be straight with me -- is it meant to be ironic? Is it a deflection? Or is it a sincere expression of how you feel?

CP: It's a total deflection. I like to cover up the possible sound of crickets, the visions of tumbleweed flying across the stage. I'll clap when the bass shorts out and my theremin tips over. I giggle when my voice cracks. If I keep the set lighthearted and show there's an underlying sense of humor, the unexpected can happen and it will still be somewhat graceful.

Q: Assess this statement, by a veteran scenester speaking in praise of the Swimmies: "With Spiraling, you have a band who says, 'we have chops, and you should care'. With the Swimmies, you have a band that says 'We don't have chops, and we don't care -- and if you care, what's wrong with you?" I thought that was funny and pithy, but the more I think about it, the more off-point and inaccurate it seems, because of course you do have chops, and quite a lot, they're just not what you're busy indicating up there.

EP: We do the best we can with the time we have. Whether it's John Coltrane or The Shaggs, it's never about the chops. You know the deal, it's not the vehicle, it's the destination.

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Interview and photos by Jim Testa

in the neighborhood with *kristin forbes*

If you're a regular reader of Jersey Beat - or just a very lucky person - you may already know Kristin Forbes.

She's been Jersey Beat's Boston Bureau Chief in the past, writing about bands in her adopted hometown, and she turns up regularly in our annual W.E. Fest reports. And if you've ever been to a show when Kristin was in the crowd, you probably noticed the hyperkinetic screaming lunatic girl who seemed to be having more fun than anybody else in the room.

That's Kristin in a nutshell. Nobody has more fun -- or brings more joy to the people she knows. And now, she's spreading that sunshine all over the place with her one-woman electroclash act - just a guitar, a beatbox, a sweet breathy voice, and that awesome personality known as Kristin Forbes.

Kristin then a teenaged film major - got dragged to W.E. Fest by her freshman roommate at BU and went back to Boston a confirmed indie-rockaholic. Goodbye, film school; hello, rock and roll. Pretty soon she was playing guitar in the ska/punk band Take 5, and when that fizzled, she put together her own group called Kitsune, where she played and sang playful indie-rock songs about her various crushes and experiences. Kitsune self-destructed faster than you can say "alcoholic drummer," though, so Kristin found herself unwillingly transformed into a solo performer. Last year, she released her debut CD, "Neighborhood," a cuddly collection of indie pop tunes, and started touring. She's hellbent on turning 2003 into the year when all of America falls in love with the girl with something extra. Ladies and gentlemen, I take great pride in introducing you to one of the coolest people I have ever met, Ms. Kirstin Forbes...

Q: I know that you were raised in New England. Was Boston always where you wanted to be when you grew up? Who were some of your early role models and idols when you first started getting into music?

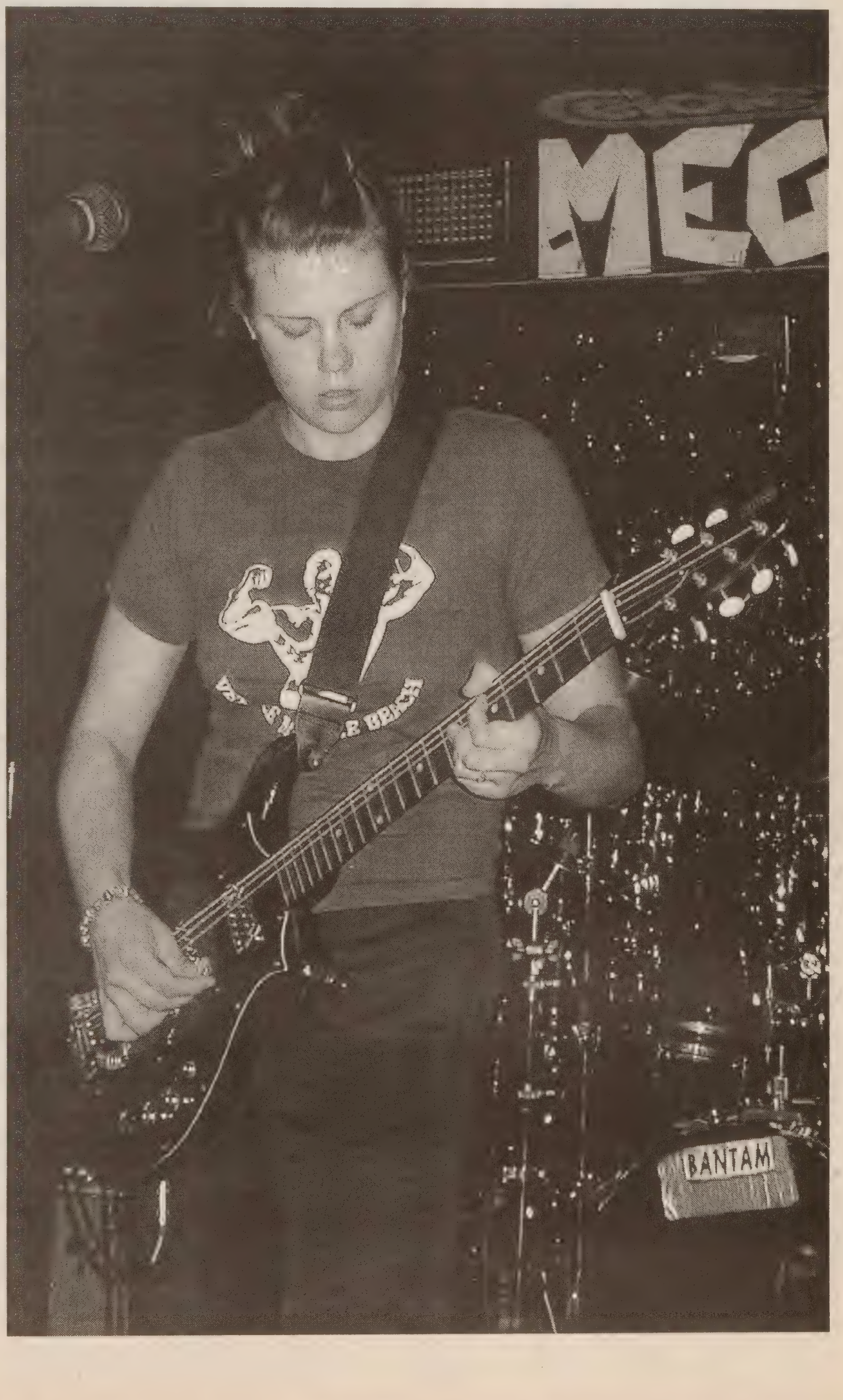
Kristin: Always? Nah. I remember thinking in high school I wanted to be in New York or Los Angeles, shoot straight for the top, right? I grew up in the suburbs, so my ideas about the size of things was a little bit skewed. Originally, I wanted to bust out and do film, and I knew those were big film cities. I ended up in Boston because, like so many people, I went to school here and just stayed. It hasn't been a bad place to live. It's a large urban city with plenty to do, but at no time has it felt overwhelming. Some of the architecture dates back farther than just about anywhere else in the country, and you can see how the city has evolved through its buildings. It's great for biking, okay on public transportation, terrible on parking. And man, has it been COLD this winter! But for now, this is where I live.

Role models? Oh dear. High school is kind of a blur. I did some musical theater, played in the jazz ensemble, got out of gym by doing flag squad.... Bands I liked? The Pixies were and still are my favorite band of all-time. The Cramps, ahhh.... I saw them so many times. I loved the Dead Milkmen, The Carpenters.

I remember discovering They Might Be Giants in junior high and feeling so cool. They're great songwriters and, for junior high, were so out there. They played frequently at Lupo's and URI. I would go to shows and just dance and dance. It was a lot of dorky fun.

I started playing guitar because my best friend in high school played bass. She could play some bass lines - Red Hot Chili Peppers, the Cure, Violent Femmes, Sly & The Family Stone - and I thought if I learned to play guitar, we could play some tunes together.

My senior year of high school, my guitar hero was the Colonel from the, well, then they were the Royal Crowns. The Colonel is the reason I'm still playing guitar. He heard me play and told me I'd got it, that I had to keep playing. Around that time I was getting pretty dejected as a guitarist,



that I'd been playing for four years and still wasn't good enough to play in bands, but right then I knew I couldn't quit. When your hero speaks, you heed the word.

Q: In the current Boston scene, are there any women in bands or solo performers that you admire and try to emulate? Anyone that you would really like to play on a bill with?

Kristin: To be quite honest, I've never really been that into girl musicians. I know that's a whole kind of sexism unto itself, but generally (and you'll hear this from other female musicians,) girls don't play their instruments as well as guys. I think that goes back to the idea that, when women are upset or excited or just feeling something bigger than their head can hold onto, they talk it up with their girlfriends. When guys are upset, they don't pick up the phone and call their dude-friends to "talk about their feelings." They express themselves through their music. Girls have clothes and hair and barettes and even their boyfriends. But I've never been into that kind of thing. I'm a weird girl, I admit it.

Also, girl music tends to be just that, music for girls. The perspective is so distinctly female that it doesn't allow the music to be enjoyed by everyone. I feel that music should be universal. Everyone has emotions, everyone can be made to feel something. Maybe girls just get a little to... girly? I don't know. I was talking to friend about this just the other day, and he likened it to Christian rock. Everyone can relate to being down and out, to feeling sorry for bad things they've done, and to get through these things with help from someone or something they take strength in. But as soon as you say "in Him" or "with Jesus", neh-eh. Most people will change the station. It's kind of the same thing.

But there are some girl musicians I dig. Amy Jacob from Prosolar Mechanics and Suran Song, those are two ladies I would kill a man to play with! I love my girl Cathy Cathodic, and I got to do a whole tour with her! She emulates everything I love about rap music: hot beats, smooth flow, insightful lyrics. She's totally inspiring; everyone should check her out. My friend Kristina Johnson's a great player; she plays in The Red and Rescue, Certainly, Sir, AND she's working on a solo project. There are a couple other girls I like that have since moved out of town. Jen Diamond (Vera Go-Go) lives on the West Coast, and Vanessa Downing (Rosa Chance Well, Certainly, Sir) got married and moved to England.

Q: You were part of an ensemble in Take 5, then you tried fronting a band in Kitsune, now you're a solo performer. Can you talk about the learning curve there and why you decided to pursue music as a solo performer. Also, talk a little about the difference between playing guitar in a band and performing by yourself.

Kristin: Well, it wasn't that I decided to be a solo performer; it kind of just came out of necessity. Take 5 ended very abruptly for me. In the course of a weekend, I fell from the top of the world, being the lone girl in a 9-piece band, to the lowest of low: I was out of the band, and it was over, poof, nothing. I didn't know anyone locally to play music with, but I knew I had to keep playing, that this was what I wanted to do. So I sort of winged it, learned to write songs by sort of emulating other people I liked musically, and kept trying to rope people into playing with me. I worked that hustle for almost three years. And after I built up a little band (Kitsune) and it collapsed on itself after only three shows, I was crushed. At that point, I wanted to PLAY and didn't want to spend the time and energy trying to put another band together. I knew I would always be able to depend on myself, so I learned how to do it by myself without simply being another "girl with a guitar." The whole process has ben about getting thrown into a situation and learning to sink or swim.

For me, playing in a band is a lot easier creatively because it's a lot more collaborative and you can share the work that goes into being in a band. I'll tell ya, if I could give up responsibility of doing my web page to someone, I'd do it in a heartbeat. If I didn't always have to drive to every gig, it'd be a great relief. But playing solo, I know I'll always be at practice, I don't have to work around anyone else's schedule, and I make sure things get done, so things get done. The hardest part about keeping a band together is catering to everyone's ego, and I don't have to do that. I'm not saying I never want to play in a band again, but for now, this is good.

Q: It's kind of amazing how many people in Boston's indie rock scene today started out playing in ska bands. Was being part of the punk/ska scene a good introduction to indie rock? What did it teach you about things like camaraderie and working together -- and do you think the indie rock scene could learn something from the punk kids?

Kristin: I don't know if musically punk and ska was a good introduction for me to indie rock. I mean, I missed a bunch of bands during this time because I was trying desperately to learn the difference between rocksteady and reggae. But it was a great way to learn what it's like to be in a band, what it's like to go to practice and come up with parts, set up shows and travel out-of town, have bandmates and meet new people.

I was introduced to indie rock in a very different way than most. I went to WE Fest after my freshman year of college, and suddenly there was this whole other world of indie rock, meaning more like "independant" rock. Everyone involved in this scene does work together; camaraderie is the cornerstone of the scene.

It's still kind of shocking to me to see that all bands don't try to work together and support each other. I mean, c'mon!

We're all musicians here and music lovers; what do we really have but each other? If we don't support each other, it's as if we each jumped into a black hole. Our image will last, but the picture fades so rapidly and grows so dim that no one will see it.

I still love ska music (I'm actually listening to the Tuesday Midnight Ska show on the MIT station as I type). Getting on the road, I meet people from the old scene almost every time I go out, and instantly we have a rapport. It's great. I'll help them out in the future, and they'll do the same for me.

Q: What's it been like trying to book yourself both in Boston and on the road as a solo woman performer? Do you find yourself confronting a lot of stereotypes and business-wise, do you find bookers and promoters treat you any differently (better or worse) than a man doing the same thing?

Kristin: Ya know, I've always wanted to be a touring musician, get on the road, live the life, the whole nine. It's become easier to book shows outside of Boston than in town. I admit, there are some places I haven't very hard to get shows, but there are some places I've tried and tried and continually have gotten the run-around.

Sometimes those stereotypes can work to my advantage. This past fall, I was desperately trying to get a show in Toronto with no avail. I called Ant because I knew the Damn Personals had played there before. Ant gave me the name of a place and a guy to speak to. "Just sweet talk him, Kristin," he said. "He's a scumbag; he'll give you a show." And he almost did. Until he realized we (Cathy and I) would be two unknowns who had never played Canada before.

I get shows just like everybody, I get turned down just like everybody. Some people are very cool, some are not. I don't feel like I'm being treated any differently. But then again, I don't really know.

Q: You've recently started touring relentlessly on your own. Boston has a reputation as a "big fish, small pond" kind of scene where bands often develop a strong local draw but don't bother touring that much. Do you find that attitude prevalent among other bands/artists that you know? And what kind of reception do you get on the road when people say you're from Boston?

Kristin: I do think people prefer to stay home. Touring is hard work! But different strokes for different folks. Other people can get booked in Boston easier than I can; I'd just rather play now than pay my dues and wait to get shows. For me, touring is like a drug; now that I've started, I can't just stop. I love the lifestyle, I love the adventure. I'm realizing the reason I've always been attracted to rock dudes is because being with them was the next best thing to being there. But the real thing is the best rush....

Occasionally, I do meet people from other cities that comment how cliquey Boston is, not just in its music scene but in all of its scenes. I'm not sure why that is. Perhaps it has something to do with the weather? Somehow it's harder to open up to someone and say hello when you're trying to keep your coat shut from the snow? I don't know. For the most part, being a touring musician from Boston is a good thing to be. Because so few people do it, it's kind of like a novelty everywhere I go, and people are up for giving me a shot in their cities.

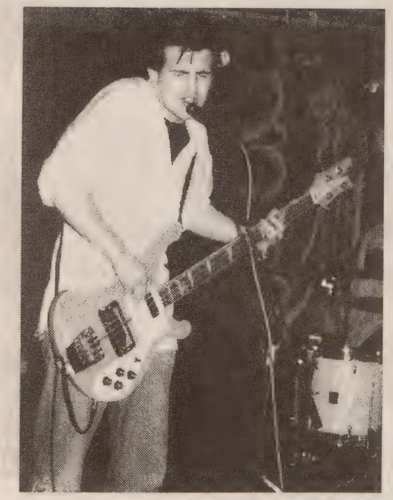
Q: How would you describe your music to someone who's never heard you?

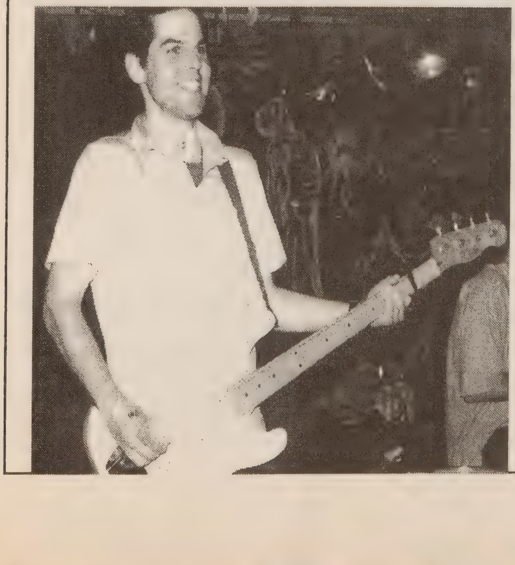
Kristin: The live show doesn't sound like the CD. I sometimes refer to my stuff affectionately as "dance-punk", meaning I will always write guitar music. That's what I play, that's what I do. The drum machine lends itself to a dance feel. The songs on "Neighborhood" are chiefly songs I did with Kitsune, which was just an indie rock-pop band. To play them live the way I do now, I reworked them to be comfortable with dance beats. Now I'm sort of writing with those kinds of beats in mind, and I think I'm getting it.

Q: You studied film for a while in college and you're a rock writer as well as a performer, so you have several different ways of looking at the process of telling a story. Do you find that any of that helps you in approaching your songwriting?

Kristin: No, not at all. I still think I don't know how to tell a story with my songs. The writing process is still a bit of an enigma to me. I have yet to really unlock my inner voice, mainly because I don't think I've had enough time to work on songwriting. I do too much. But all that's about to change....

Visit Kristin Forbes at
www.kristinforbes.com





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che chapter 127

Political Punk From North Of The Border

By Jason Schreurs

Photos courtesy of the band

Make no mistake about it; Vancouver's Che Chapter 127 are a political band. For the past four years, they have asked listeners to unlearn what they have been taught by a capitalistic society. Their website, CD packaging, lyrics and live shows have followed suit, dealing with issues such as colonization, violence against women and gays, reproductive freedom and the ills of a capitalist/imperialist society. Their latest album, Profit Prophet, is a groove-heavy attack out now on G7 Welcoming Committee Records, home Propagandhi, Malefaction and Swallowing Shit. I spoke with lead singer Meegan Maultsaid, also the organizer of Vancouver's Rock for Choice for the past eight years, about the power music has to inspire and educate. Interview conducted in early January, 2003.

What has the band been up to lately and how is the new CD on G7 Welcoming Committee doing?

Since the record came out we have been playing a lot more shows and getting emails from new fans in places like Australia, Brazil, Ireland and Germany. That aspect has been very cool, to know that we are not limited to the well-worn ears of our own community. I don't know exactly how many units we've shifted, but G7 seems happy, so that's a good sign. New developments include writing what are probably the best songs of our career. We're planning a cross-Canada tour for the spring.

What's been pissing you off lately?

The state of the world constantly pisses me off. I follow the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, am outraged by the impending doom on Iraqis, was moved to participate in demos in support of the Woodward's squatters [Vancouver group who took up residence in an abandoned department store], we played a benefit for a new group called Coalition to End Police Brutality to show our anger at recent police bullshit in our community...

What's been inspiring you?

I love the new Boysetsfire record [*Live For Today* EP on Wind-Up/Sony]. I listen to it everyday. I'm often inspired by hip-hop, because the messages are powerful. We love our G7 label-mates Warsawpack also. I am not inspired by the new Rage Against the Machine/Chris Cornell collaboration [Audioslave].

Yeah? I haven't heard the whole album yet. What's it like?

It's really bad. First of all, it's completely apolitical, so it's quite depressing in that regard, to think that three members of a band who were totally fired up and totally involved in different ideas and movements are basically putting something forward that's completely the other direction. It's like Soundgarden-lite or something.

Okay, can you tell me why you used Che Guevara as the namesake for your band?

Well, the idea with the name is using the idea when people quote the Bible and they say, "From John, Chapter 16" or whatever. My idea was, what if people cited revolutionary figures and their ideologies? So what if someone used Angela Davis' philosophies and said, "In Davis, Chapter 17 it says..." So, just using Che Guevara as a reference point because I probably know the most about Latin American politics, more than anywhere else in the world, and he's an easily recognizable radical political figure.

It must be kind of hard balancing politics and music. Some people might like your music and not your politics, and vice versa. Do you think consciously of that when you are writing music or do you just do what you want to do and hope people will get into it?

We're a pretty non-methodical band in that way. The guys create the style of music that they like to play, which I also like, and the idea for Che is to be a vehicle for radical ideas and radical content. We're coming from a position of being a political band. Since the record came out, the reviews of it have been completely, dichotomously split. People are either like, "This rules, it's awesome to see a band that's so cohesive with their politics and they not aren't afraid to talk about different things," and then other people are like, "This is bullshit, this is so preachy and who the fuck do these people think they are?"

Do you find that the politics are turning people off the music? Or the other way around?

I don't know, there's definitely people who I would say respect what Che does but I think they have the idea that we're nu-metal or whatever sonically, and then there's other people who say the music is great but it's too pedantic, it's too preachy. Ya, we're kinda trapped, man, we don't really fit in anywhere.

Does that concern you at all?

No, not really. We've made allegiances with people based on the political end of it. That's why we are with G7 and we try to play with bands like Submission Hold or people we feel more affiliated with politically. And we're not scenesters, we're too old to be scenesters. Being cool and wearing the right clothes and listening to the right music — I don't give a fuck about any of that. That's too high school and too apolitical for me and I'm not interested in that. So, in terms of us not "fitting in" as part of the scene, I don't think we really care. It's not like we're elitist, but in fact we are not buying into the elitism of that.

How important is your local community of artists and activists? You have Kim Kinikan (ex-Sparkmarker), Jen Thorpe (Submission Hold) and Kinnie Starr on your album.

The community is very important to me, although I often feel more inspired by other activists, rather than people who make music. It is good to have allegiances with other artists too, but we try to avoid the scenester-ism and cliques that are so prevalent. Kim and Jen are probably two of my all time favorite singers in punk music, so it was an honor to have them on the CD. Kinnie is a good friend of mine and I have respect for her work too, so that was cool. I sang on her last CD too, bet you couldn't have guessed that one.

You were telling me that you think the music you are writing now is the best of your career. Can you tell me about the new stuff?

When Khris, the drummer, joined last year we had already recorded six songs as an EP and we weren't necessarily going to put it out, and that is what G7 heard and they wanted us to record more songs. We wrote only a couple of songs with Khris and he also played on a couple of other songs. His signature and what he adds to the band wasn't as apparent. He really helps drive the sound because his style of drumming is total non-rock drumming. Super break-beats; that sort of feel. And I think we're just getting better at what we do, we're more cohesive as writers because the rest of us have been playing together for so long, and the addition of him adds another element. We just wrote a song recently and I think it's probably the best song we've ever written.

What's the purpose of Che Chapter 127?

The purpose of the band is to share information, to be a conduit for information. Obviously, music is the soundtrack to a lot of people in different communities, lots of young people, lots of activists. I feel the impetus for the band was to be a soundtrack to rebellion; a band that people who are doing activist work can use as a methodology to get fired up or be inspired, and also for younger people, especially in communities where there isn't a lot of access to political information. That's why I want our website to have a lot of content and links.

What was your feeling the first time you heard Rage Against the Machine?

Oh, inspired, for sure. I was just blown away because there was nothing like it, right? It's always interesting because every interview I do, someone always sights Rage. Like I just did this other interview and I guess in the photo that they are using I'm wearing a Rage Against the Machine T-shirt. It's just funny because for me they are definitely a big influence, I think he's [Zach de la Rocha] incredibly articulate, incredibly intelligent, they've always put their money where the mouth is. But of course they were signed to Sony, of course they weren't part of any underground movement, so I'm sure scenesters are like, "Who fucking cares about them? What have they ever done?" without actually realizing the things that they did do and that you can do that at every level.

The reason why I asked that is because I'm curious how it feels to know that your music could now inspire other people like that?

It's positive because it's a continuation of the cycle. Everyone takes inspiration from different sources and if a young person in a small community hears Che, buys the CD, reads the lyrics, goes to the website and feels motivated, either to play music or motivated to get involved politically in other things, or even just to become aware... That's the whole thing with the CD, I never wanted it to be preachy, like, "These are our beliefs and you need to subscribe to these things, and here's the checklist of the things you need to do to become a political activist." I don't believe in that because it's political elitism. And people in smaller communities don't have a rally every second weekend that you can attach yourself to, or some kind of scene. It's also about people unlearning historically what we've been taught, and treating other people around them with respect. They seem like clichés but those are important ways of social change. Social change doesn't just happen in a vacuum, it also happens by the way people interpersonally act and treat people around them. I'm definitely an advocate of that.

How much power do you think music, or art in general, has to change people's opinions?

I think it carries a lot of weight, for sure. Different kinds of musicians in different communities, like underground hip-hop, those people are doing activist work outside of their music, but also within their music, and a younger generation of people are looking towards them for information or opinions or feedback. If you break it into different forms of music, in each community there's a lot of power, but there's also a lot of scenes that are apolitical, and that's fine too. I guess the older I've gotten I've become more radical and more entrenched in my own political ideas, but I've also become less judgmental of other people's apolitical-ness.

How old are you?

I'm 36... I don't want to devote my energy into trying to convert people who are choosing some other path. I prefer to find allies or people who are open-minded, who want to unlearn stuff. You don't always want to be fucking pushing people down the path of least resistance, you know?

Have you had responses from people saying, "Hey, this song really made me rethink the way I thought about that," or, "It changed and helped me"?

Sure, definitely on tour when we played some smaller communities and came back there was a barrage of emails. Some of them are like, "Wow, you guys rock! You're really cool!" and that's great too, and other people are like, "After you were here I went to your website and I learned some more about the Palestinian/Israeli conflict," and I'm like, "Yes, that is the purpose of Che!"

That must feel really good to know that you've made some change.

For sure, because they are all just seeds. There's all kinds of things; music is one thing and then there's other people doing other kinds of activist work. I guess I look at Che as kind of an activist project.

For more information about Che Chapter 127, check out:

http://www.chechapter127.com
http://www.g7welcomingcommittee.com

Related political links

http://www.refuseandresist.org
http://www.prisonwall.org
http://www.zapatistas.org
http://www.democracynow.org
http://www.indymedia.org
http://www.nomoreprisons.org
http://www.feminist.org

AGE AGAINST THE MACH

Retisonic: The Lean Beat Revolution

by Darren "Hollywood" Paltrowitz
Photos by Jim Testa

Sometimes the subject of an interview can make me feel stupid. Perhaps my facts weren't straight, perhaps my questions weren't all that creative. In this case, I was the subject of dumbness via Q&A with Retisonic's Jason Farrell. Farrell, one of the most witty and intelligent people I've had the pleasure of doing a piece on, has come a long way since his days in Swiz and Bluetip. His work with the highly-original Retisonic, with drummer Joe Gorelick (ex-Garden Variety) and bassist Jim Kimball (ex-J Majesty.) will hopefully earn him the due that's deserved in 2003. Retisonic's J Robbins-produced "Lean Beat" EP ought to wow listeners of all forms. Is this an all-star band? Perhaps, but there's nothing gimmicky or one-off-sounding about Retisonic. Read on...

Q: What's something that you wish more people knew about Retisonic? Do you think there are any misconceptions about the band?

retisonic

Mean It!

Jason Farrell: Right now, our only goal is to have more people know anything about Retisonic. Our label is small, our band is new... these are our first shows in the States. We are still too new to have misconceptions surround us, except for maybe the correct way to pronounce and spell our name. I saw one marquee list us as ARTISONIC. Lacking an "E," I could only shift the existing letters to spell "RATISONIC." Clearly others in that city had spelling issues, because all the bands on that night's bill were spelled incorrectly in the paper as well.

Q: You were in Swiz. a band from D.C. that were contemporaries of Soulside, Jawbox and Shudder To Think. What brought you to relocating up North? Why'd you choose to get out of all of that, Dischord included?

JF: Swiz wasn't on Dischord. We put out two records on Sammich, a small label run by Amanda MacKaye and Eli Janney. A then-baby-sized Jade Tree released our final seven inch in '92 -- a couple years after our breakup -- followed by *No Punches Pulled*, a CD that compiled all our recordings. Swiz's first tour was with Soulside, the second with Shudder. After that I still lived in DC, became a graphic artist, did many covers for Dischord. In '95, I started a new band called Bluetip. We put out four albums on Dischord. I moved to NYC in 2000 to be with my girlfriend, Bluetip broke up a year later. I don't feel DC was something I had to "get out of all of that"...I simply started a new band, Retisonic, in my new town, NYC. I am glad that I have had a chance to live in a city other than the one I was born in.

Q: Are you still in touch with any of the people from those days?

JF: No reason to cut ties with the folks I've known for 15 years over a four-hour [trip].

Q: How would you compare the scene from your early days to that of now? How would you compare a Swiz show from 12 years ago to a Retisonic show of today?

JF: Odd question. For the "scene," I could say nothing or everything changed, and I'd be right. People still get up and play their songs, through their Marshalls or whatever, thinking it's the most original and daring move in the world. Some kid throws a vocal PA up in a VFW Hall, some club promoter is a dick, someone sells a T-shirt, someone sleeps on the floor, someone has the show of their life, or the worst, or the most average. There's something endearing and pathetic about the repetition and the belief that each event is important; because it IS very important, and very unimportant. Special and spent up. The difference from Swiz to Bluetip to Retisonic is that I finally think I know what I'm doing. Though I thought this in 1988 as well.

Q: And while speaking of Retisonic performing live, how would you describe one of your shows to someone yet to attend one? On a scale of one to ten, how would you rate Retisonic's rock star-posturing in a concert situation?

JF: A distillation of all our past first-hand experiences and collective wisdom in this live music thing. Shameless admiration of guitar. Slavish dedication to rhythm. It's not my place to judge, but it is my personal goal to have you and publications like yours score us in the eight-and-a-half to nine-and-three-sixteenths range. As for my posture, I'd give it a seven.

Q: One of the things that sets your band apart from nearly all others is the vocal interplay -- nowadays especially it's very rare to have a drummer that can sing more than "ooh la la" backing vocals. Where do vocal arrangements come in terms of the songwriting process?

JF: All the songs have started from me playing my guitar, scatting some melody. All else builds around that. The last tonal thing is to strengthen the melody with a supporting harmony, followed months later -- and days before recording -- with lyrics that make some sort of sense. P.S. I think we actually have used "ooh la la."

Q: Your label owner at Silverthree, Mike Harbin, plays bass with J Robbins in Burning Airlines, is that how you wound up with J producing "Lean Beat?" Or had you known J otherwise?

JF: J had produced all but the first of four Bluetip albums. We started with him when he first started recording bands -- '95?. It seemed like the natural choice to work with J again on this new project. The "Lean Beat" EP was recorded before we knew who would put it out...Mike heard it, loved it, and offered to release it on his brand new label Silverthree.

Q: J is someone who's produced many bands, yet some of those bands are now headlining theaters and big clubs with exposure via mainstream radio and television. What does he bring to the table as a producer? Why do you think he's so sought after as a producer?

JF: People like him because he is good at what he does. He brings a ridiculous amount of excitement and enthusiasm to the studio. Seems some of the bands he's worked with are doing quite well, and hooray for them, but a word of warning is in order: The TV adds ten pounds.

Q: Do you have a way to describe the music as heard on "Lean Beat?"

JF: Actually, we came up with "Lean Beat" as a phrase to describe our music: lean arrangements, leaning to the beat. An emphasis on tight song structures, melody, harmony, power. Other phrases don't quite work: Words like "punk" and "rock" mean nothing and everything to different people. So "Lean Beat" -- the EP -- sounds like Lean Beat -- the genre. Right now it's a genre of one, but anyone is welcome if they adhere to our strict rules set out in the Lean Beat doctrine.

Q: Your bio mentions that fans of The Damned, Cheap Trick, At The Drive-In and Fugazi will like "Lean Beat," which implies that you guys are fans of all of those bands. Are there any bands you're into that'd surprise even your closest of followers?

JF: Japanese girl-pop ala AIKO, Hank Williams Sr., Skid Row, Judas Priest, Discharge, Missing Persons...plus just about everything that was spoon-fed to us via the radio as we grew up in FM America.

Q: What about Kenny Loggins?

JF: No, though the "Caddyshack" theme song is pretty rad...but I might be projecting a bit, because the movie itself is rad. Have you ever heard him talk? He has an alarmingly high-pitched speaking voice.

Q: Beyond the music, the art of "Lean Beat" really holds its own. Would I be wrong to assume that you freelance in graphic design? If correct, is there other album artwork that you've done?

JF: Yeah, I do record covers. Many of the Dischord releases (Hoover, Circus Lupus, last five Fugazi records and all but one of the Lungfish albums). Also did the At The Drive-In "Relationship Of Command," Burning Airlines "Identikit"...tons...well, like, 70.

Q: With a European tour behind you and the album out since October, what do you think is Retisonic's biggest accomplishment yet?

JF: Those two things. future accomplishments might include some or all of the following: a full-length, multiple U.S. tours, a phenomenal break-up.

Q: Are there any goals you are holding for Retisonic in 2003? Or even yourself?

JF: Write good songs, record them, play them live. Not very original, but goals none the less.

Q: What, if anything, are you hoping readers of this interview will remember first and foremost about Retisonic? Is there anything you haven't had the chance to speak about that you'd like to plug or discuss?

JF: I'd simply like to get our music into the ears of those that might appreciate it.

Q: Finally, Jason, any last words for the kids?

JF: Grow up.

To see some awesome photos of Jason skateboarding (and other stuff,) visit www.retisonic.com

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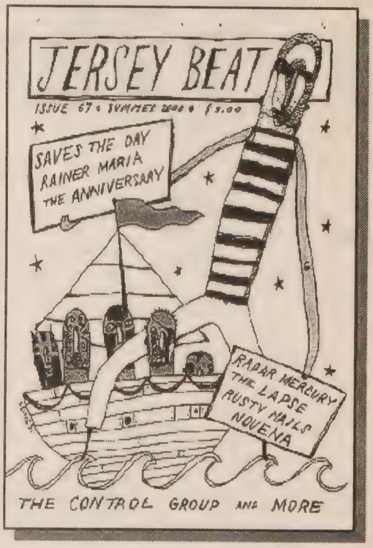

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#71 (20th Anniversary Issue – Spring/Summer 2002) RYE COALITION, Daniel Rey and the making of Joey Ramone's farewell CD, The Break, Weapons For Peace, The Negatones, Slow Wire, American Nightmare, Headwound, Gregg Yeti Vs. Kenyata Sullivan, NJ Shore Report, and enough reviews and columns to provide engrossing bathroom reading for weeks.

#72 (Fall/Winter 2002) MIKE WATT, The Realistics, Superdrag, Dead Meadow, Tear It Up, Hero Pattern, Fixer, Double-Breasted, Drive Thru Records label profile, Tris McCall's "NJ Vs. Williamsburg" essay, W.E. Fest 2002, and all the usual stuff.

All back issues are $3 to: Jim Testa, 418 Gregory Ave. Weehawken NJ 07086

the milwaukees

By Jim Testa

Dylan Clark: singer | songwriter | guitar
Dave Post: bass
Brian Stoor: drums
Jeff Nordstedt: guitar

As you'll read elsewhere in this issue, there are only two things that my friends agree about when it comes to the subject of Emo: None of us likes it, and nobody knows what it actually is. That sentiment goes double for The Milwaukees, the hard-touring NJ quintet whose singer Dylan Clark was emoting at full volume in dingy little clubs throughout the Garden State long before anyone in these parts had ever heard of Dashboard Confessional or Thursday. So let's start by agreeing that the Milwaukees are NOT emo, and just carry on from there... This interview was conducted in my living room, shortly before the release of the band's third full-length CD, *This Is A Stick-Up* on Canada's Does Everyone Stare? Records. In the course of about two hours, the band drank almost all the beer in my refrigerator and went through two bags of chips and salsa, and if you think some of the stories in this interview are funny, you should hear the ones that I promised to keep off the record. But anyway, this is what they had to say...

Q: So what's new since the last Milwaukees interview in Jersey Beat two years ago?

Dylan: Well, we got Jeff (Norstedt).

Q: I think we can all agree that was a good thing. What else?

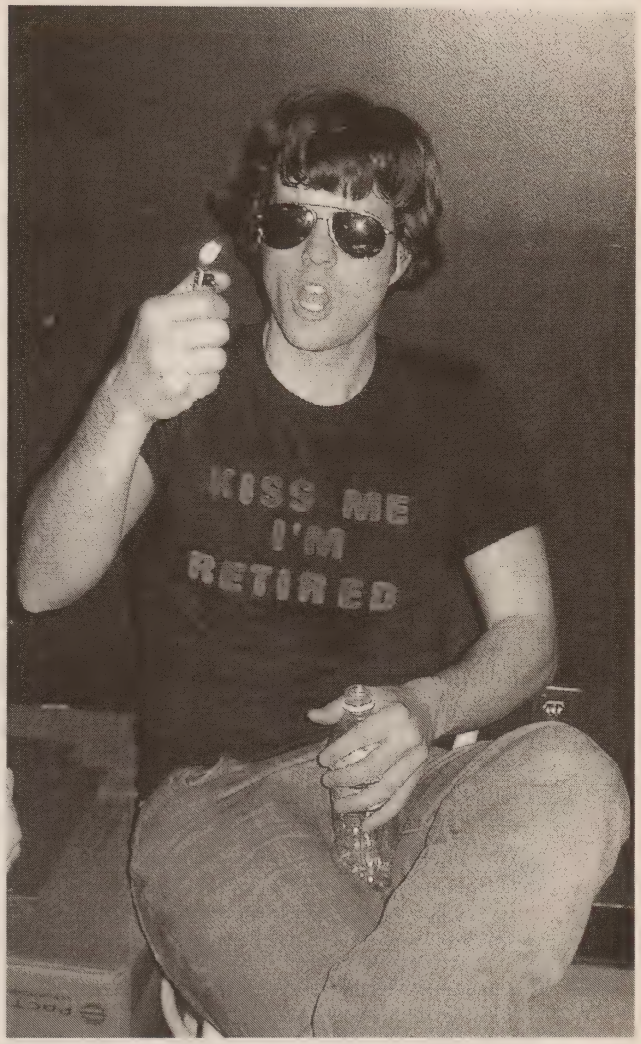
Dylan: And the other thing is that we have a new record label. After a couple of years of trying to decide whether we were or weren't going to do another record with Childlike, we left Childlike and put out a record in Canada. And now we're looking for a label here in America, and we're going to tour as much as we can for the new record.

Q: Dylan, you got banned for life from Canada, right?

Dylan: Yeah, I got banned for life.

Q: It's funny, I talk to bands all the time and they're all saying that it's so much easier getting over the border now than it was a few years ago. And you guys are on a Canadian label, but your lead singer is banned for life from the entire country. That sounds like a story.

Jeff: We toured Canada once, and we went straight at it. We just lied. We said we were there to do some recording. Glenn from our label has a friend who works at Bryan Adams' studio, so he just sent us phony recording contracts and we went over the border saying that we were just going to Canada to spend money and record there. Lied - no problem - we toured Canada - great. So then Glenn licensed our next record *Missile Command* and we went back to tour on that record, and since everything went so smoothly the first time, my bright idea was... See, we had heard so many horror stories on the road about getting your gear and your merchandise seized at the border, so my idea was, why don't we deal this legal? We'll pay a couple of hundred bucks for the working papers and we'll go into Canada all legit and not have any problems. This is going to be a great tour, no reason to fuck it up. So Glenn calls the Immigration people and they told him to do X, Y, and Z... whatever it was, we do it all and pay all the fees, and then we get to the border, and we show them the first thing, and they're like, that's no good, you don't need X,Y, and Z, you need A, B, and C. And they had this whole list of things that we didn't have, like signed contracts from every venue we were playing that were stamped by the Dept of Labor, and all this stuff. So we just backed up, and figured we'd be smart and just lie like last time, so we just drove 90 miles west and waited a day, then went to the border again. Well, the first thing they ask you... if they can tell you're a band, you get herded out of your van and into a building, and they ask have you ever been denied access to the country. So we're like, well, yeah. When was that? Well... yesterday. So they put us all into separate rooms and interrogate us. And basically, what happened was that Brian gave it up and told the truth, and Dylan stuck to the cover story, which resulted in him getting arrested.



Dylan: Nice guy, but banned for life from Canada

Dylan: It was nice, they gave me these rag mags to read and I got fed vegetable soup...

Jeff: He got fed and was all comfortable in this cell, and the rest of us just had to wait around this Customs Building on a wooden bench for hours and hours.... So the bottom line is that Dylan got released but he's banned from Canada for life.

Dylan: I can appeal it in a year or something. I figure our only chance of getting back sooner is if the record gets so popular that they figure it's in their best interest as Canadians to have us come back to tour and sell records on our Canadian label. But otherwise, I'm just as good as a terrorist to those people.

Jeff: That was the other funny thing. We're sitting there forever, freezing our butts off someplace in North Dakota, and all these dudes are coming through with their guns. "Hey Bob, what're you doing this weekend?" "Oh we're just here to shoot us some moose." "Okay, that'll be 15 dollars." So they're walking right through with all these guns and stuff, and we're there with our guitars and t-shirts getting sent away....

But it's turned out to be a good situation for us. We left Childlike and we were talking to a lot of different labels. And basically the only people who would actually talk to me weren't going to cut it for what we wanted to do. So we wound up licensing the new record to Does Everyone Stare? in Canada and this label Boss Tuneage in the UK, but we own the masters and we're in control with what we do in the U.S. They pay us in CD's, so we can sell all the CD's they give us, and we actually have a better chance of making our money back. And they're doing all the radio promo and advertising and other shit that labels should do, without us owing them any money.

Q: Let's talk a little about Jeff and how he's changed the band. Because it seems to me, knowing you both before and after, that the biggest change hasn't been in the music, it's that you guys just seem to have your shit together now.

Brian: Well, we got a person who rocks on guitar, and is also a responsible individual – which God knows the rest of us aren't. At least speaking for myself. I'm not a responsible person. My responsibility is playing drums…and trying not to go to jail. So it's nice having someone who takes care of all the other stuff.

Dylan: Yeah, I guess, whatever. I always wanted another guitar player, but every guitar player you bring into a band is all about "I need more amp!" It's all about just getting his riffs heard. Whereas Jeff is all about looking trying to contribute instead of trying to be this Nuno Bettencourt kind of guy, flipping his hair around on stage and prancing and making hot faces. Which we now want to do. (laughs) But the thing is, Jeff rocks. He was the perfect fit. He rounds out the rest of our personalities really well. Because Dave is, like, off the deep end, forget shit all the time.. he's like the guy who's always off doing his own thing. And Brian and I are kind of in the middle. So Jeff is the perfect balance, he neutralizes Postie's powers for chaos.

Jeff: It's like, you always know Postie's going to be trouble. With Dylan and Brian, they switch off back and forth.

Brian: At every show, either me or Dylan is going to be Jeff's best friend that night. One of us will be good, and the other one will fuck shit up. And then the next night, it'll be the other guy.

Jeff: I think, going back to what you said, our getting our shit together was just a matter of us coming together to be in a band. At the point where we finally had a serious record out, things finally started to happen to us – we got to play better shows, we got to go on tour, and more than anything, that's when we learned how to be a band. And it just happened to be right after I joined.

Dylan: See, I think compared to most bands, we did it backwards. I think that with most bands, they have their whole thing down – they have their look, they've got the touring going, they've got all their networking down. And their music just stinks. With us, we had a good record – with *Missile Command*, everybody was saying, wow, this sounds like a major label record – but we just didn't know how to be in a band. You can put out all the good music you want, but if you don't as a band know how to be a band… And that goes for everything, how you handle yourself, how you act on stage, all of that. And I think in the last two years, that's what we've learned, to the point where now we're pretty confident in what we do on stage and not give a shit about the other stuff.

Q: Has it been different writing for two guitars?

Dylan: No, not at all. I don't even know if we write for two guitars. Adding more extra goodness is just kind of like seasoning a steak. You don't need it. I bring in an idea and we all start working with it. If someone's doing something that isn't good, we all just sort of sit around and talk about it. No one in this band is like a Freddy Mercury or a Steven Tyler where they're going to start screaming if they don't get their way on a song. What do you think, Dave, is it any different?

Dave: I think it makes it easier for me. I have more to listen to than just Dylan, I have another aspect, another guitar to work off, than just listening to Dylan's part and trying to rock.

Dylan: The truth is that the whole band is built around Postie. That's the bottom line.

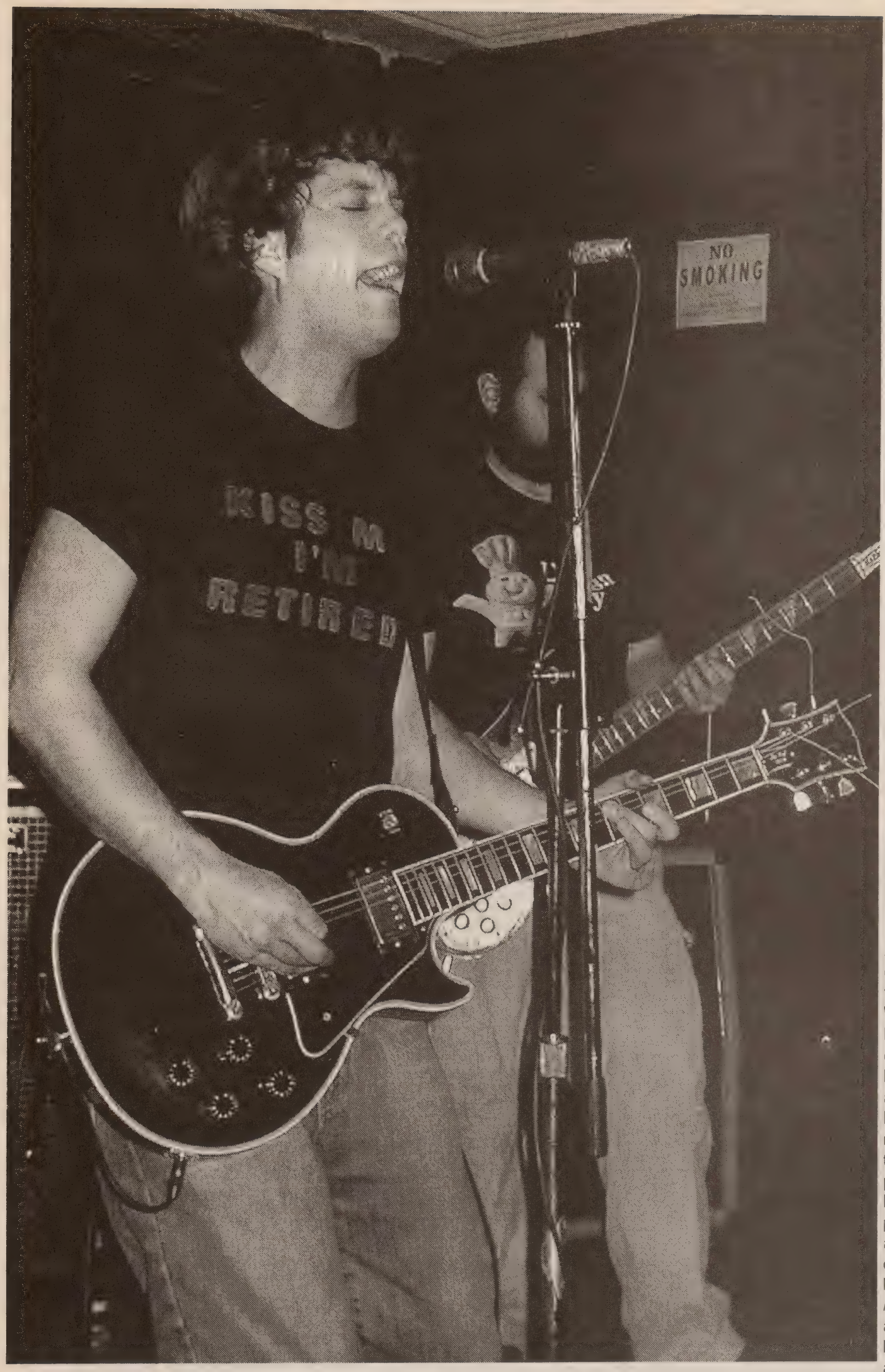
Jeff: He's our secret weapon. Everybody sees Dylan screaming and jumping all over the stage, and really it's Postie holding it all together.

Q: Well, I asked because in listening to the new CD, I didn't really hear a quantum leap there. Musically it sounds like a continuation of *Missile Command.* What should people listen for that is different?

Dylan: I'm glad you said that it's still the Milwaukees in your review, because that was pretty much the point. I wasn't concerned with making a record that sounded like anything else, I just wanted to make a record that sounded like the Milwaukees but had a progression to it. We just want to sound like us -- we don't want to be punk, we don't want to be emo. We don't want to have a sound where, as soon as the band comes on, you say, "Oh, it's this kind of band. Here you go." We don't want to fit into any little label.

AIRBORNE
Janis
ADDICT 10

Photo by Chris Poppe



Brian: We want to be arena-rock, and that doesn't exist in small clubs.

Dylan: I think we've gotten better. I think the chops are better, I think the songwriting is as good if not better. I think the playing is just better... it's more raw, too. I think this record has more punch than *Missile Command.*

Jeff: It's funny because we did an EP ("The Bland Comfort of Life With Lloyd Justin"), which was intentionally heavier and more raw. I had just joined the band, and Brian was still very new in the band, and we immediately wrote about six or eight songs together. And at that point, we weren't even very good yet at playing the *Missile Command* songs together as a four piece, but we did know what kind of band this was turning into. So we instantly wrote and recorded those songs, just to capture the feeling of what we were doing at the time, which was just the four of us getting to know each other. Some people really liked the new direction, which was a little more raw and a little more ballsy, and some people thought we were just trying to be 'indie' by sounding not as produced. So this time, there was some reticence about going off in that direction. We really wanted to go both ways -- we wanted to have the energy and grittiness of "Lloyd Justin," but we didn't want to be lo-fi and garagey. That wasn't the direction we were going in. We're not really going in any direction, we're just doing what we do. And the other thing we tried to do this time is make a whole record - as opposed to writing a bunch of songs that don't necessarily connect to one another. Like on *Stick Up,* there are those two songs that run together... When we first started writing the record, we actually talked about just having forty minutes of continuous rock running together with just track breaks on the CD. And we finally realized that was a bit ridiculous, but we started from there, and I think everything we wrote together has a consistent flow to it. And that was really important to us. That was something that (producer) John (Agnello) really had a feel for. He knew that we didn't have a ton of money or a whole lot of time in the studio to make this precise perfect pristine thing, but he worked really hard with us to get a feel for what we were doing and get that out of us.

Q: He has such a great reputation, going back to his work with Dinosaur Jr. and Quicksand. What exactly does John Agnello bring to the table as a producer? Is he the kind of producer who's actually re-arranging songs in the studio, like, "let's put the chorus first on this one..."

Jeff: He did a little bit of that, but actually, we've gotten really good at that ourselves. In fact, that's something we learned a lot working with Wayne (Dorrell at the Pigeon Club studio.) We had so much time while we were waiting to find out if we were going with Childlike or another label that we just went to town on our own songs, and we kind of knew how to do it from doing it before with Wayne. So we recorded a demo of most of our new stuff and gave it to John, and then he came to see us at Uncle Joe's. We played really horribly that night for some reason, but John was really positive and gave us this big pep talk, and he was like, "You've got to do X, Y, and Z, and I'm going to put you on a steady diet of Elvis Costello and Led Zeppelin." And we were like, "YES! That's what we listen to! You got it!" And from there, he came to a couple of practices and made some suggestions. But mostly, he just knew what we wanted to do and helped us do it, and we didn't need the re-arranging as much as someone just giving us the tools to document what we were already doing.

Dylan: When we were recording with Wayne, the process was usually us playing something and then Wayne wanting to change it, and then me and Wayne screaming at each other and arguing, and then Wayne finally saying, "just try this, it's going to be cool," and then finally something would come out of all that. With this record, I didn't feel that way once. I always liked what we were doing and I never felt any friction with John, because he's really laid back. And above everything, he's a nice guy, he's fun to be around, and that's why everyone likes him.

Brian: I think the best thing is that he just liked what we were playing. His main intent was just to capture our sound. He didn't want to rearrange our shit or make us better, he just wanted to get us on tape.

Dave: He got really good sounds too.

Jeff: Yeah, we're not really a patient band. And what John did for us is not even make us feel like we were making a record. We would just set up and go, and it was never this thing of "what kind of microphone, what kind of amp?" And he just made sure we got the best sounds out of that.

Q: Dylan, I met you about six years ago, and I can vouch that you've always sung the same way, which is to say that you sing with a lot of emotion. But if someone were to hear you today for the first time, my guess is that they would say you're "emo." And I know it bothers you. So talk a little about the whole emo thing.

Dylan: (Hurt) Do you really think I sound *emo*? (laughs) See, to me, the whole emo sound is the kid with the really thin voice complaining about his girlfriend. And I can see that some of the songs on *Missile Command* were sort of like that. But since then, I've really made it a point not to sing straight-on love songs, because I find the whole genre is just so watered down. Like, we *know* that you really love your girlfriend, we *know* that the stars are in her eyes, we *know* that you'll swim the *oceans* to be with her, we know all that shit. So forget it. No matter what, if you have a good song, you have a good song. I know we sound like that, and I can understand it, but I just hate that label.

Q: I wonder if you have to fight that perception.

Dylan: A little bit, I guess.

Jeff: I don't think we fight it so much. Our bottom line is that, sometimes we'll play a show and all the emo kids are getting off on us, and we're like, *Oh man, they think we're an emo band.* But on the other hand, you know what? They really fucking like us. So we don't complain. It's more a problem when someone asks, what kind of band are you? And you know that people think you're emo and you have to address it without copping to it.

Dylan: Sometimes we'll be setting up for a show and some kids will come over and say, "what kind of band are you," and I'll just say, "we're ROCK, we're a fucking ROCK band," and people think "rock" is just the worst word in the dictionary.

Jeff: Or like when we played that show in Winnipeg with all those speed-metal bands, and they said they were all "punk" bands.

Brian: Aerosmith is a goddman emo band.

Dylan: Smashing Pumpkins is an emo band. All these bands are emo bands. At moments, anyway.

Brian: Goddamn Motley Crue is an emo band.

Jeff: We were selling merch with all these bands from Canada and there was this band from Holland or someplace that came over and asked us what kind of band we were. And they were all decked out in their perfect punk uniform, and they knew exactly what they were, and they knew exactly how to answer that question of what kind of band they are. And all we could say is, "we play rock music." So before our show they were apologizing that they'd have to leave after one song to get to the next city or whatever, and instead they wound up staying for our whole set and totally rocking, and then they all bought our merch. And they were like, "you guys said you were a *rock* band, but that wasn't a rock show. You were so *emotional!* And we were like, *noooo*, it's just rock.

Dylan: So that's it. I apologize if I sound emo.

Jeff: So you tell us. We don't know what we are. What would you call us?

Dave: Emo-grunge-punk-pop.

Q: Well, you can't be the emo-pop prince. That title's already taken, the Village Voice used it on Val Emmich.

Dylan: Well, look. I like Val a lot. Or as I call him, Matt. But here's the thing with Matt. Matt might be a little better looking than me, but I'm just a shave and a haircut and few less beers from competing with him in that department. He loves our band. He tells me all the time, "dude, I model my life after you." So if he's going to be the emo-pop prince, then I say that I'm the King. (everybody laughs) But really, our mission is just to have people say, "This band sounds like the Milwaukees."

For more info, check out www.milwaukees.com

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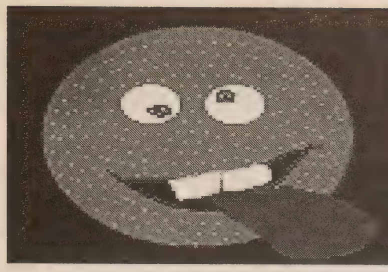


CLEVER HANS

By Josh Davidson

Quinn English-Drums
Frank Mount-Bass
Matt Prol-Acoustic and Backing Vocals
Dave Sgalambro-Guitar and Vocals
James Wells-Guitar and Vocals

In this age of hip-hop, dance, techno, emo, and Britney, raw guitar pop-rock has become a dinosaur. What once was seen as sell out music now is rarely heard.

This makes playing it all the more dangerous.

Clever Hans is a New Brunswick band that blends its influences into an infectious sound. The band plays pop in an unconventional way in a day and age when it has become completely conventional.

The band still manages to keep things structurally simple and melodic. Hans just finished its first EP called *Radio Ready.* The disc, produced by the band and the Churchills (who recently recorded its major label debut "You Are Hear" for Abrupt/Universal Records), is a mix of biting guitars (James Wells, Dave Sgalambro, Matt Prol), dancing drum rhythms (Quinn English) and inventive bass (Frank Mount).

The line-up is unconventional in that Sgalambro and Wells both sing lead, while Prol handles harmonies and plays third guitar.

The two prime songwriters, Sgalambro and Wells, write with contrasting styles that combine to one signature sound.

Clever Hans is a band that not only knows the meaning of melody, it also knows the meaning of risk. The band breaks its musical boundaries by knowing and exceeding its limits.

The band was nominated as B-est Pop Band and Sgalambro as Best Pop Vocalist at least year's Asbury Music Awards.

If more local bands like these surface to the mainstream, pop may come out of extinction.

Q: When did each of you guys start playing music?

Mount: I started playing when I was fourteen. Actually, I figured bass would be easy. (*Laughter*) One of those morons. And it just snowballed from there. It just came naturally, I guess. I put a lot of work into it.

Wells: I started playing guitar back in freshman year of high school. I found a Beatles' book. I started playing and banging it out. I took lessons for a couple of years. That kind of made me a little better than not good. So I was a little better than not good. So I just kept on doing it. I never performed in bands until I met Dave. One thing led to another and he was teaching me how to write songs.

Sgalambro: I started, playing piano when I was (about five or six). I quit that. I moved to Jersey, started playing guitar. Quit that. Started playing a whole bunch of sports and then finally decided to start playing bass when I was 15, because I figured it would be easy. I played bass for a while. (Then) I wanted to meet chicks, I wanted to write songs, so I stopped playing the bass and started playing the guitar. I guess I was like 16-years-old at the time. I started writing songs. Someone liked the first song I wrote so I was like, 'Cool, maybe I could do this.'

Q: What was the name of the first song you wrote?

Sgalambro: The first song I wrote was "Just Another Sunny Day." Then came my big hit, "Paradise," and that's what everyone liked. So I kept just writing songs.

English: I got a drum set in seventh grade. I got to high school and these guys basically convinced me to be in their band. It was a Christian rock band actually, I wasn't really into the whole Bible reading thing. But, that's basically how I started playing drums. I learned from being in a band and playing a long with these guys. After that, I was in a rap-rock band for a couple of years. These guys, they convinced me to be in the band.

Prol: I've been playing since fourth grade. I played alto-saxophone for like ten years. As soon as I got out of high school, I stopped that and I started playing guitar with James (Wells), because we grew up together. We were always toting our acoustics to parties and we would play. I've been guitar now for six years.

Sgalambro: And here we are...

Q: How do your songs sound different in comparison between when you're onstage to when you're in rehearsal or listening to your music on CD?

English: You listen to a CD and all you're getting is the music. When you're watching a music video, you're not 100 percent focused on the music. You're watching the video, you know. You come to the show, you see guys jumping around and having a good time, you're going to jump around.

Q: How do you think you were able to develop into a band that draws a consistent crowd?

English: Rutgers (University, New Brunswick) alone has 50,000 kids. Say we get 100 freshmen to hear our CD or hear us or catch something at the student center. They tell two friends and they tell two friends and so on and so on...

Q: What topics do you like to cover in your songs?

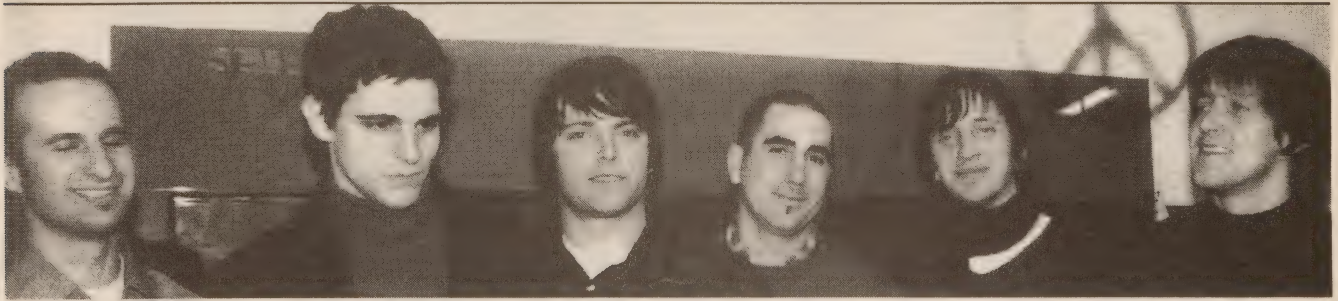
Sgalambro: "Tuesday" is about Sept. 11. It's a little bit heavier. It's about Tuesday, Sept. 11. There's some meaning and relevance to me in it. I went through a bad time with that.

Wells: Relationships. That's all that I see, is one relationship. Whether it's with a girl, whether it's with a band mate, whether it's with your parents, your family. Whatever it is. It's just one big relationship. Some of them go better than others.

Q: When people listen to your music do you think it gives them something to relate to then?

Wells: I hope so. That's what we try to do. Write about stuff that everyone's going through. That everyone can relate to.

For more information, visit www.cleverhansmusic.com



sparks fly from a kiss

Jesse "JJ" Rudner – analog synth, organ
Johnny Sex – guitar, vocals
Ralph Nicastro – vocals, guitar
John Crocco- drums
James Daly – bass
Stephan Ethan – samples and white noise

Story and photos by Jim Testa

To those who would argue that New Brunswick has no scene left, I commend you to Sparks Fly From A Kiss. This sextet has roots in a dozen different New Brunswick projects, and it seems as if almost every musician in Middlesex County has passed through the band's ranks in its 30 month existence. "Over the past two and a half years, we've had 12 members, six lineup changes, two repeat members (one of which has played two different instruments,) and at one time, we were a 3-piece and Johnny Sex and I would switch on and off on the drums," notes guitarist/vocalist Ralph Nicastro, best known for his long stint in one of the area's most beloved bands, Aviso' Hara.

You get the feeling, to paraphrase the old X song, that when the last living band finally leaves the Hub City, it'll be Ralph Nicastro who'll turn out the lights. Sparks Fly From A Kiss remains one of the few Jersey acts around who are still proud to call themselves a "New Brunswick band," and who still welcome frequent gigs at The Court Tavern as opportunities to interact with friends and neighbors.

But no, this isn't some musical flashback to 1995 -- SFFAK's nearly ambient, keyboard-filled, new-age musings are light years away from the four-on-the-floor garage-punk that's always dominated the New Brunswick scene, from the early days of the Smithereens through the mid-Nineties glory days when Bionic Rhoda and Boss Jim Gettys could sell out any room in town on any night of the week. The songs of Sparks Fly From A Kiss carom across the musical spectrum with a feverish disregard for genre conventions or stylistic niches; from dainty to dangerous, from new-age to nervous breakdown, the band's music represents an unpredictable mélange of influences as diverse as (to quote their official bio,) "Spiritualized, The Rolling Stones, Modest Mouse and The Beatles." Welcome to the 21st Century.

Sparks Fly From A Kiss's story sounds like some wacky musical variation of "Who's on first?" The band began as a collaboration between Ralph and Johnny Sex, who were working together at a bar/restaurant at the time. "Johnny started humming a Pavement song, and then when he finished, we all just started talking about playing music," Ralph recalls. Jesse "JJ" Rudner came aboard on bass. At one point, ubiquitous New Brunswick drummer Tommy Bendel played drums. Steve Nathan brought his samples and weird noises to rehearsal one day and became part of the ensemble. "I remember looking up and saying 'Who's this guy?'" says Ralph. "But then I kind of liked what he was doing."

"At one point, we were rotating members so fast that Steve kept getting confused," recalls Johnny. "He'd come to practice and pull me aside and say 'what's the bass player's name? what's the drummer's name?' At one point, the band opened for Frank Black as a six-piece, then immediately went back to a quartet. "Then we went from a four-piece to a six-piece, to a three-piece where Johnny and I both played drums," continues Ralph; and at one point, when Jesse moved to Boston and the band became a duo, "Johnny and I just went into the studio by ourselves and recorded a few things." "But," adds Ralph, "this right now is the best it's ever been." The current six-person lineup has been stable for about six months, and the band has every hope it'll stay like that for a while.

Sparks Fly From A Kiss actually started to take shape when Ralph was still in Aviso' Hara. "Aviso was the four of us playing Walter's songs, which was fine, because I respect him immensely," he explains. "Now, it's John and myself. We're similar but we're different. Different singing styles, different writing styles. I really think John has been the catalyst for this band. A lot of what you hear, a lot of what our sound is all about comes from him."

"But it's also Ralph," adds John. "He's much more in control now. In a lot of ways. More control of himself, more control of his music."

"The sound has definitely evolved as the members changed," Ralph notes. "When James came in on bass, it definitely started to move a lot more. No slag on anyone else who played bass, but he's really brought it all together. With this lineup, we're much more at ease at practices. Plus we're just growing, maturing... it's a natural progression."

James Daly came to Sparks Fly after 10 years of playing with basically the same group of people. "We were called Sunday River, Best Boy Electric, Drivestar, Driver, Rev 386 – we played under all these different names, but we did pretty well. I guess you could say we were semi-professional." They were good enough to beat major acts like Bush and Sponge in a national Battle of the Bands in NYC at one point, but James says that the chemistry in the band was just wrong. "When I played with those guys in soldout clubs and saw all those screaming people shoulder to shoulder watching us, that's when I knew that this is what I wanted to do with my life," he says. "But when I started playing with these guys, it was just like, wow, good music *and* they get along. What a concept!"

"The chemistry now is perfect," adds Johnny. "We're both more comfortable and more confident with each other."

"Yeah, there was a stage when we were doing whippets on stage just to hang in there," jokes Ralph.

Stephen Ethan is the most non-traditional member of the ensemble. He came to Sparks Fly after playing in electronic acts like Multi-Media Sound Collection and Colorblind. "I did a lot more there than I'm doing in this band, actually," he notes. "I did sequencing, so I was writing the drum parts and I had a really big set-up. But then I hooked up with these guys and it was an interesting chemistry, obviously. But we hooked up right off the bat and write four or five songs right away that really seemed to work. I like what I play with them, either noises on some songs or drum samples or even keyboard lines on some songs."

If Aviso' Hara was the sound of a band tilting on the edge and just about to fly off the tracks, Sparks Fly From A Kiss is all about control – a series of sustained competing tones, an almost ambient drone, a raw vocal against an elegant, undulating melody. For comparison, I threw out two bands, late-period Feelies and the dronier songs of the Velvet Underground.

"I can sort of see what you mean by that," notes Stephen. "Especially more in the songs we're writing now. Ralph or John bring in a riff, and the whole song starts to take on that shape. I definitely see us evolving in that direction."

Ralph, James, John

"I sort of enhance my creativity with certain things, so that might lead to that – the droning," notes Ralph. "I was definitely going for a more moody sound. John and I both."

"The melodic side of it has been what's appealed most to me," adds John. "We do some loud disruptive stuff too, but the melodic stuff has been always especially nice for me."

Quiet melodies and sustained drones are not what one would normally associate with New Brunswick, a scene that's churned out a seemingly endless parade of loud garage-punk bands over the years. So how have fans taken to this new direction?

"Our reception has been great right from the beginning," says Ralph. "Plus, there's six of us. So if we bring five people each, we have a good show. And I'm sure we all have more than five friends who come to shows. (laughs) But it's not just our friends who come to shows. We've gotten good feedback from everybody. When we play the Court Tavern, it's front to back, every time. If we go to the Brighton Bar or somewhere a little farther away, it might be a different story. But we do rock out occasionally. We have our rock songs, which we use when we play someplace where people aren't already familiar with us. You want to try and keep the energy as high as possible."

"We got a great reception at the Otto Bar in Baltimore," notes Jesse. "There were only ten people there, but they all loved it. They all stood right up front and listened to every note. That was a great opportunity."

"We're going to be playing New York City a lot more now," notes Ralph. "We just signed with a management company, who are going to do our bookings there. For one thing, there are just so many more choices. You can never really wear out your welcome, because you could probably never play every single club there is in the City. Here, New Brunswick has definitely become a one-trick town, one place where we can play unless you count basements and stuff. But New York… You can definitely sense that there's so much more energy there right now, both from what you feel there and from what you read. That's why we really tried to put a barrage on the city. And that exposure got us the attention of people who are going to book even more shows there for us. We're also trying to book something right now so we can go down to W.E. Fest this year and tour on the way down."

The band will also be releasing a 6-song CD-EP on Baltimore's amBiguous City Records sometime this Spring or early Summer. "We're drawing from around 16-17 songs we have recorded," Ralph notes. "This is just something right now that we can hand out at shows," says John. "We did a 7-inch vinyl EP, which is cool, but vinyl really doesn't do much for you anymore. We want to get the EP out just so we have something that we can get on the radio and give to fans." The next goal will be to find a label willing to finance and properly promote a full-length CD.

"We all work so we can't just up and go out on tour," says Ralph. "But we're trying to do what we can, play some colleges and we'll be in the City a lot." And as for their home town?

"You can't ever say that New Brunswick is dead," says Ralph. "People are still having shows in their homes. There's still a lot of interest in hearing music there."

"I think that's what you're going to see a lot more of in the next few years, a lot more of the scene going underground, basement shows, the way things were in the early '90's," adds Stephen. "I know a lot of people who are having some really big bands play in the basement. And there are still a lot of new bands coming out of New Brunswick."

"This is a hospital town and a corporate town for Johnson & Johnson," says Ralph. "It always has been. I'm surprised the Court Tavern is still standing. But there's always going to be kids who want to hear live music here."

And there will be musicians like Sparks Fly From A Kiss making something for them to listen to.

Showdates, photos, and a really confusing bio at www.sparksflyfromakiss.com

Stephen Nathan, samples & stuff

Valient Thorr

Men are from Mars; Thorr are from Venus

By Eric Walls
North Carolina Bureau Chief

Valient Thorr is a band. Valeint Thorr is a man. Or, if you can believe the claims, Valient Thorr is a self styled prophet from our neighbor planet Venus that has been stranded here on Earth due to some freak accident and has decided to try to save us from our backwards, destructive ways through the healing power of Rock n' Roll. Part punk rock attitude, part arena rock grandeur, part side street preacher, part space age philosopher, part psychotic madman; wherever they're from, Valient Thorr rock with the best of them from '63 to '03. Witnessing a Valient Thorr show is like being whisked into some twisted Southern revival where Rock n' Roll is your sacrament and your communion. The sheer power of the music and the charisma that seems otherworldly draws you into the world of Thorr and for maybe 45 minutes you feel like there is hope, there can be a change for the better, the kids will indeed be alright. Whether they're from Venus or not, they make Rock n' Roll and experience again. They make it mean something again. They make it dangerous again. Maybe they're just trying to infect us with alien propaganda to prepare us for the invasion. Maybe they're madmen who should be in institutions. Maybe they are whom they claim and mean what they say. Maybe they're just some crazy art students from Greenville, NC with a passion for Rock they way Rock was meant to be played and the genius to create their own mythos. Maybe not. I for one was desperate to find out. So, I sat down with all 4 Thorrs and put them to the test. Here's what transpired.

Q: – Tell us who you are.
VT – I am Valient Thorr. (vocals)

Q: – Valient Thorr? Where did that name come from?
VT – We're born under the ice. When we are extracted from the Third River Under the Ice, it is put into our brains with fucking needles.

Q: – The ice is put into your brains with needles?
VT – No! We COME from the ice! The name is served up from a list. We are all Thorrs. All from the Third River Under the Ice are Thorrs.
DT – I am Don Thorr.
JT – I am JJin Thorr. (guitar/keyboards)
Dr. S – I am Dr. Strangees! (bass)

Q: – No Thorr ? Why isn't your last name Thorr as well?
Dr. S – Because I'm actually from this planet.

Q: – And the rest of you claim to be from Venus, is that correct?
VT – We ARE from Venus!

Q: – Oh, excuse me! You ARE from Venus. Well, if you're from Venus what brings you to Earth?
VT – It wasn't intentional. We've come here a few times in different time streams to try to change things.
JT – Holy shit! What's that!

Q: – It's just a roach.
Dr. S – Didn't we smoke that shit last time we were here?
JT – She's back! Someone kick her out. She didn't pay to get it!
VT – You'll have to excuse him. We don't have any bugs on Venus. Because.... OK, you see you can't live on the outside of Venus, let's get that straight.

Q: – So you live underground?
VT – There's many cities in the middle of Venus. We came here to save the earth with Rock N' Roll.

Q: – Why does the earth need saving?
VT – The Earth is a fallen race, man.
JT – You guys are the only planet that can't get along!
VT – The only planet out of zillions of planets!

Q: – So everyone gets along on Venus?
VT – We don't even talk to each other, man.

Q: – What, is it all telepathy or did I miss something?
VT - Yes.

Q: – So you guys are probably talking to each other right now and I wouldn't know it.
Dr. S – We are talking to each other right now! (Laughs somewhat deviously...)

Q: – But I thought you were from Earth! How did you hook up with these Venusian guys?
VT – He's an UFOlogist. We crashed in his yard.
Dr. S – I've been studying this shit for a long time, man, and when these guys crashed up on my place I just knew that the shit was not right, man. It's time the shit hit the fan, man!

Q: – Had you been in contact with them before they crashed at your place?
Dr. S – No.
VT – Well, he had but he didn't even know it because he was one of the only people on Earth that can use more that 10% of his brain. He WAS an ufologist. Now, he just sorta directs all of our operations here on Earth. We've been to Earth a record number of 57 times. That's more than any planet we've ever been on, BUT, we've only been here once in this Timestream. And now we're stranded in this Timesteam.

Q: – What do you mean by Timestream?
VT – Well, it's really difficult to explain if you've only ever been in one Timestream. Once you leave and you come back and you realize you can hit any time you want to go to. The very first time, 57 times ago, actually in the year 1957 we came here and Dwight Eisenhower didn't believe us.

Q: – You actually met with Dwight Eisenhower in 1957?
VT – Third level, underground in the Pentagon.

Q: – What did you have to tell him?
JT – The same thing we try to tell everybody, man!
VT – We didn't use Rock n' Roll in the beginning. We used force.

Q: – But what was the message?
JT – You're the only Fallen Planet.
VT – We NEED to save you, to help you. Dwight was down with it, but the CIA and FBI, who were just starting to gain power at that time; they're fully in power now, but then they were just starting to get their fangs into the US Government, they said "Listen, if we tell all these crazy earth kids that these guys are from Venus, it's gonna be anarchy, man!"
JT – Hey, hey, hey! Tone down on the anarchy, man! It's a utopian society of individuals who enjoy freedom without government, pal! It's not necessarily chaos and disorder.
Dr. S – So we started a Rock n' Roll band..... (more devious giggling.....)
VT – Listen to this man! We've all been reanimated! We were caught in Germany during the Cold War!
JT – Don't fucking bring that up, dude!
VT – We came from ice, went back to ice!

Q: – Are you immortal or something?
VT – No, there's no suck thing. There's no such thing as death or life.
JT – We're fucking kids! We just know what's up.
VT – I'm not talking comic book shit here holmes! There's an evil on this planet that's way more powerful that common hatred.
JT – Some call it the Antichrist.
VT – Know what we call it? Ignorance.

Q: – Ignorance is the Antichrist, is that what you're trying to say?
VT – Well, it could be. It manifests itself in many different ways. It could be a door that accidentally scrubs against you to some ignorant asshole. But you know what? Ignorance is gonna be the death of the human race, man. Because you won't open your minds and embrace the entire universe. You just think planetwise. It's like a scene, man. It's like a rock n' roll scene.

Q: – So how do you plan to save us?
VT – Just opening your eyes to other cultures one planet at a time. If you can get along on this planet then other planets won't be afraid to come here and be like, "Hey, man, there's fucking more shit out here!". Technology will advance and the whole cosmos will be open and you can travel across the universe, man!
JT – You can't imagine all the shit talking that goes on out there about Earth.
VT – Yeah, man! And we're like, "Give 'em a chance, man!"
JT – They fucking hate Earth.
VT – Give 'em a chance, you know? There's so many other planets out there that have been suppressed for so long and they turned around. Its just takes someone like us to come around and try to convince you. Create a problem, solve it.

Q: – So why use Rock n' Roll to deliver this message?
VT – Because Rock n' Roll is audio art and visual art. You can fucking *taste* Rock n' Roll, you can fucking *smell* Rock n' Roll. You can see Rock n Roll, you can eat it, and you can fucking shit it out, man.
JT – We realized that Rock n' Roll is the most powerful force on Earth and we're taking hold of it. We're using it.
VT – Everyone can leave something behind that they've created. That's power, man. That's beyond flesh and bone. You don't have to leave your Timestream. If you don't believe that we are from Venus believe this; What you create lives on and it will influence future generations.

Q: – So we're all immortal in a way then.....
VT - Exactly! If an Earth person can't understand that then we might as well get back to Venus. But we can't. Our fucking ships busted.
Q: – So, how do you think this "conversion", so to speak, is working so far?
VT – The response is good. It's not the confidence anymore; we've got the confidence. We just need the forum. Bigger spaces. Bigger and badder! That's our message!

Q: – So, how did you get stranded here anyway?
VT – Every time it's a different story. You go back in time and not big things change, small things change. This time our ships run on fresh water as fuel, You know what? There's ain't a whole lot of fresh water left here on Earth, man. People shit in it everyday. So we decided to make the best of the time we've been given and really make an effort to save this planet from itself.

Q: – Are you still in contact with Venus?
(JT cell phone rings) JT – That's them now. Nanoo, nanoo.

Q: – Do you think that humans are capable of receiving and understanding this message you're trying to convey?
VT – So fare every person we've touched in that special way, with our fingers.....
JT – They keep coming back, I'll tell you that much!
Dr. S – They keep coming! (more devious laughter)

Q: – So what do Venusians look like on Venus? Do you look like what I'm seeing before me now or is it different in some way?
VT – You could handle it. But we would look silly to you. We don't want to be poked and prodded by scientists up our assholes. Venusians have assholes, too. They look a lot different than Earth assholes. But we're still hot. I mean, look at us! We're three Venus dudes and one sexy earth dude. We based ourselves on your skin so it would be easier for you to swallow our message.
JT – And our love!

Q: – So what's next for Valiant Thorr? Where does your mission go from here?
Dr.S – We got so much going on you wouldn't even understand! This is just small time here, man! By this time tomorrow we'll be so far away from here.......
VT – Well, we've only been here for, what 6, 9 months?
JT – Six.
VT – Six months. We made our first appearance in March of 2002 and so far we've come a long way. We should have a recording out by Feb of 2003. We also have a video.
JT – He discovered the camcorder and I discovered the keyboards!

Q: – You don't have those things on Venus?
VT – Well we do but they're not called those things.
JT – And they're not possessions. They're just there. You don't have to go to Best Buy or Circuit City. There's no money or capitalism.......

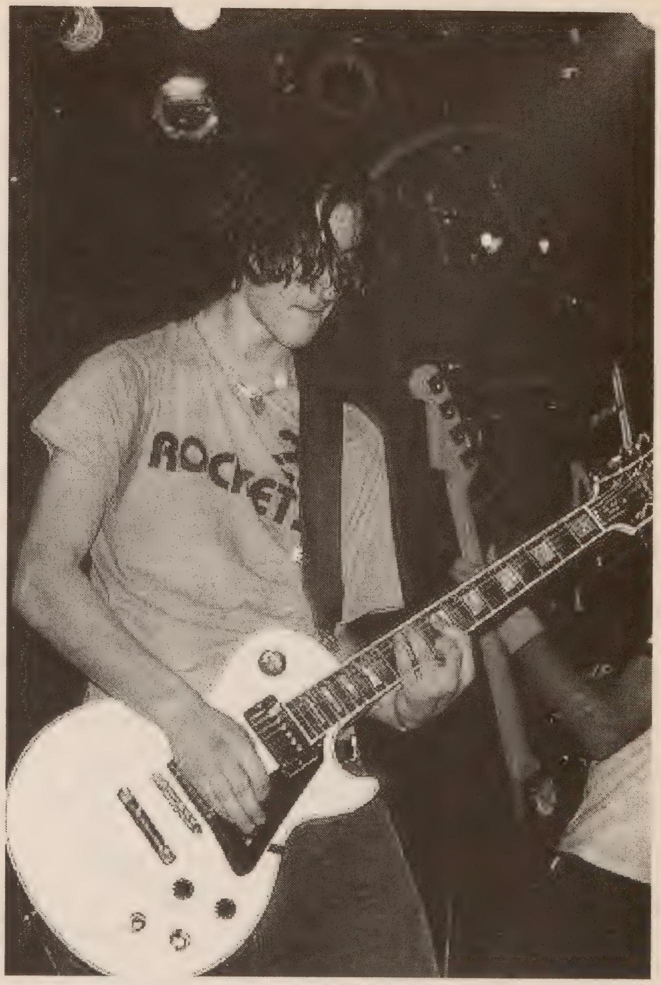
Q: – You don't work?
VT – Unless you consider what we're doing work, no. We're missionaries!
Dr. S – We're missionaries of Rock n' Roll!
JT – We're anarchists, we're preachers, we're rockers, we're lovers.

Valient Thorr will be touring in '03 and will be releasing a CD sometime this Spring. Check the website for specific dates or info. Witness the rebirth or rock in the Space Age. Check out Valient Thorr! **www.valientthorr.com**

TRIPSIDE Lookin' Sharp on Long Island

By Jim Testa
Photos by Mike Zinn

Ryan Siegel -- vocals/guitars
Frankie Martinelli - guitar
Mike Sadis - bass
George DeHaven -- drums



Long Island has always had a decent hardcore scene, but after that, it was pretty much Kiss cover bands and Billy Joel wannabe's. Or at least that was the stereotype. Of course, there's Jones Beach in the summer, and the Nassau Coliseum if you can't get tickets to a big concert at the Garden (and don't mind the 4 hour drive)... but most Jersey and New York City hipsters -- bands and fans alike - consider Long Island about as much of a music scene as Lower Slobovia.

So imagine our surprise when Jersey Beat discovered that Lawn Guyland currently has a talented crop of young indie-rock bands, a decent all-ages circuit for them to play, and a sizable group of young fans supporting the whole shebang. Maybe we'll actually sic our Long Island Bureau Chief, Hollywood Paltrowitz, on a bona fide scene report sometime soon. But in the meantime, here's one young LI quartet that might soon be making some noise on other side of the LIE.

Tripside's story starts in 2000, when then-high school students George DeHaven and Ryan Siegel started something they call a "hybrid funk band" (and would now rather forget.) With the eventual addition of Mike Sadis on bass, that group eventually morphed into Tripside, showcasing Ryan's strong melodic vocals and romantic lyrics, Mike's aggressive basslines, and George's steady power drumming. It didn't hurt that Ryan and Mike, both still in their late teens, looked like refugees from a boy band, leading to a sizable female-teen following.

Last summer, the group recruited twentysomething guitarist Frankie Martinelli (from the red-hot LI group Greyscale) to flesh out their sound, and they've been on a tear ever since, headlining local clubs on Long Island, making frequent forays into Manhattan, and releasing their debut EP, "Tomorrow." We caught up with them backstage at The Elbow Room at one of their winter 2003 gigs. After catching up on a short history of the band, we lunged at Frankie and asked why he abandoned a gig in one of the most popular bands on Long Island to play with guys appreciably younger.

Q: Frankie, Greyscale gets great shows and has a huge following, what persuaded you to leave them for a bunch of skinny teenagers like these guys?

Frankie: (laughs) I guess mostly it's because I wasn't happy with the songs that I was writing. I was a big part of the writing with Greyscale, and I just had my doubts about where they were going musically. I still think they're an amazing band, and I'm still friends with them. I fell in love with these guys about February of 2002. The first time I heard them, I knew I wanted to play with them. I sat in on a few shows and then we made it official.

Q: Does the age thing make much of a difference? They're 18 or 19, you're in your mid-twenties...

Frankie: Hey, I'm not that old!

Ryan: We're still trying to figure out if he's still a teenager at heart or we're just mature for our age. But we think it's a little of both.

Q: There's always a lot of serious shitwork in bands -- booking, promotion, getting everybody to shows on time... Do you find yourself playing the dad because you're the oldest one and taking charge of stuff like that?

Frankie: Yeah, I guess you could say that I'm a little bit of a daddy figure. Which I don't mind. We need structure, so...

Ryan: He keeps all of us in check.

Q: It seems like you guys gig an awful lot, especially since some of you are still in school. Do you also keep up a steady rehearsal schedule?

Ryan: Yeah, we try to rehearse two or three times a week.

Mike: At least twice a week.

Q: And it seems like you're gigging almost every weekend or more, like five or six times a month.

Ryan: Yeah, and we're going to be doing that a lot more in 2003. We'll be going out of state a lot more, we'll be touring…

Q: Is it hard devoting so much time to the band at your ages? George is still in high school, he must have to worry about exams and SAT's and whatever…

Ryan: School was never really much of a focus for any of us.

Q: So you're not at that angst-ridden decision-making point of band or college?

ALL: (laughs) No… no college!

Ryan: I'm attending part time school right now, but I'm doing that so I'll be free to give as much time as I need to the band.

Q: How do your parents feel about it?

Ryan: They're our biggest supporters. If they didn't help us out, we wouldn't be here. They're huge supporters.

Q: You guys are working really hard right now. I'm sure you sit around and talk about the future. What are you working for, what's your big dream? A record deal? Playing bigger venues? A national tour?

Ryan: All of the above.

Frankie: I think we're all ready to tour.

Ryan: We're ready to see some new faces and hit the road. The record deal will come, we're very confident with that. We feel we have the stuff to do it. It's just a matter of making the right deal. It has to be a matter of us making new fans instead of getting stuck in a hole. So we definitely want to make sure our livelihood is based around touring and making new fans all over the world.

Q: How about the record? That came out this fall. How has the reception been?

Ryan: The reception has been great. Reviews, fans, everything has been positive. We're recording new material right now, actually, so we really can't wait to get the second record out. But all of the response to the first record has been great.

George: We got written up in "Long Island Ear" as the No. 1 local CD of 2002.

Ryan: And WLIR-FM has been very, very friendly to us.

Q: Since I've been following the Long Island scene, it seems like a lot of bands there get into the Big Fish/Small Pond thing where they develop a big following and then just keep playing to the same faces over and over. Whereas I see you guys are playing in Manhattan at least once a month, you're traveling up and down the East Coast…

Frankie: We want to reach as many people as we possibly can. We're ready to go all over the world if we can.

Ryan: Long Island has a lot to offer in terms of good fans, great fans, a good hometown. The scene has taken a huge turn in the last five years, and now it's way more about the original bands than the cover bands. But we come into the City just to gain that respect and gain the fan base. There are millions of people here.

Q: And the industry is here too.

Ryan: Sure, that's definitely important.

Q: I notice that you're not very big on covers, and you're still at the point where you're playing most of your shows to the same fans over and over… How do you keep the set fresh? And how do you keep yourself excited about the material?

Ryan: We try to write new songs as much as possible.

Frankie: We're working on quality, not quantity right now. We're trying to make sure our shows are as tight as possible and the people who do follow us around, we want to make sure that we're impressing them more and more each time, even if it is the same songs. But it's never exactly the same set list anyway. We do change things around all the time. We never play the same show twice in a row.

Ryan: Sometimes we'll take the songs and change them around a little bit, just to add a little spice.

Q: That's obviously a big incentive to tour, since then everything is new to everybody every night.

Ryan: Yeah. We're definitely looking forward to seeing new faces every night.

Q: Has Frankie become involved in the songwriting since he's been a member?

Ryan: Oh yeah. We've only written three or four new songs since he joined, much of which were built on old ideas that we were already working on. But the new songs that we do have, he's added a great deal to that we've never had before. We're really looking forward to writing a lot more with him.

Q: Frankie, you've been around a few more years than these guys, but have you noticed a real turnaround on Long Island in terms of the support for original music over cover bands? The LI cover band thing has been a huge stereotype for as long as I can remember.

Frankie: I haven't been around that much longer! (everybody laughs)

Ryan: I think that the indie rock has this whole image that you have to be a downtown New York City cigarette-smoking hipster…

Mike: Like the Strokes.

Ryan: Exactly. The Strokes created this image that all these indie bands have that kind of image.

Frankie: Whereas if you look at some of the bands coming out of Long Island like Brand New and Taking Back Sunday, they're so totally different from the whole Strokes thing…

Ryan: I think what's special about us is that we're not really doing the whole punk-rock indie vibe... We're playing more a mainstream, heavy vibe. Just giving it a nice groove.

Q: Yet you bring a lot of punk-rock energy to it. You don't stand on the stage like mannequins, you move and jump and get into the music.

Ryan: I think we're all a fan of punk rock in some shape, way or form. But I think it's just a really cool vibe when you can move around and show off.

Mike: The whole punk rock thing's about having fun, and although we're not punk rock, it's still all about having fun.

Ryan: I think showing a bit of that energy is definitely what keeps people coming back. We don't want to just stand there like we're a bunch of jazz musicians.

Frankie: The music just makes us move.

Q: I know you guys are friends with Nine Days, a Long Island band that recently had a really miserable major-label experience and got dropped really quick. Have you talked about major labels and how fast you'd consider making that move if an offer came along?

Mike: We're definitely looking to get signed as soon as we can. But we understand that we have to be patient and that, if a record wants to come to us, we'll sit down and talk. But first we want to get out and play for more people... let the labels come to us.

Ryan: I guess the way we think about it is, if we can find a way to get more fans and play bigger shows without a label, then for right now, that's the way to be. It's just a matter of how much you can do on your own before a label wants you to come aboard and make money for them. Until you can make money for a label, there's really no point in signing.

Q: You guys have a great interactive website, so I left a message on your messageboard and asked your fans to tell me what question they'd want me to ask. The first question was, if you could open for any other band, who would it be?

Ryan: 311 and Foo Fighters, I think. Two great bands. (everybody else pretty much agrees, esp with 311.)

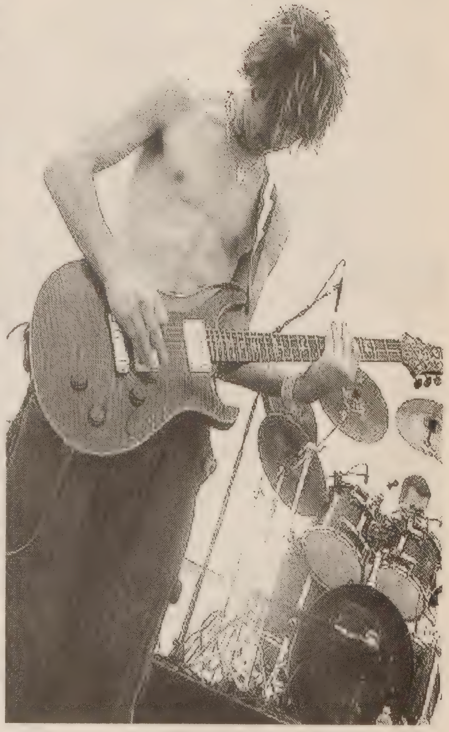
Q: And the second question was, Can I kiss Ryan? That comes from the girl who wrote the question, not me.

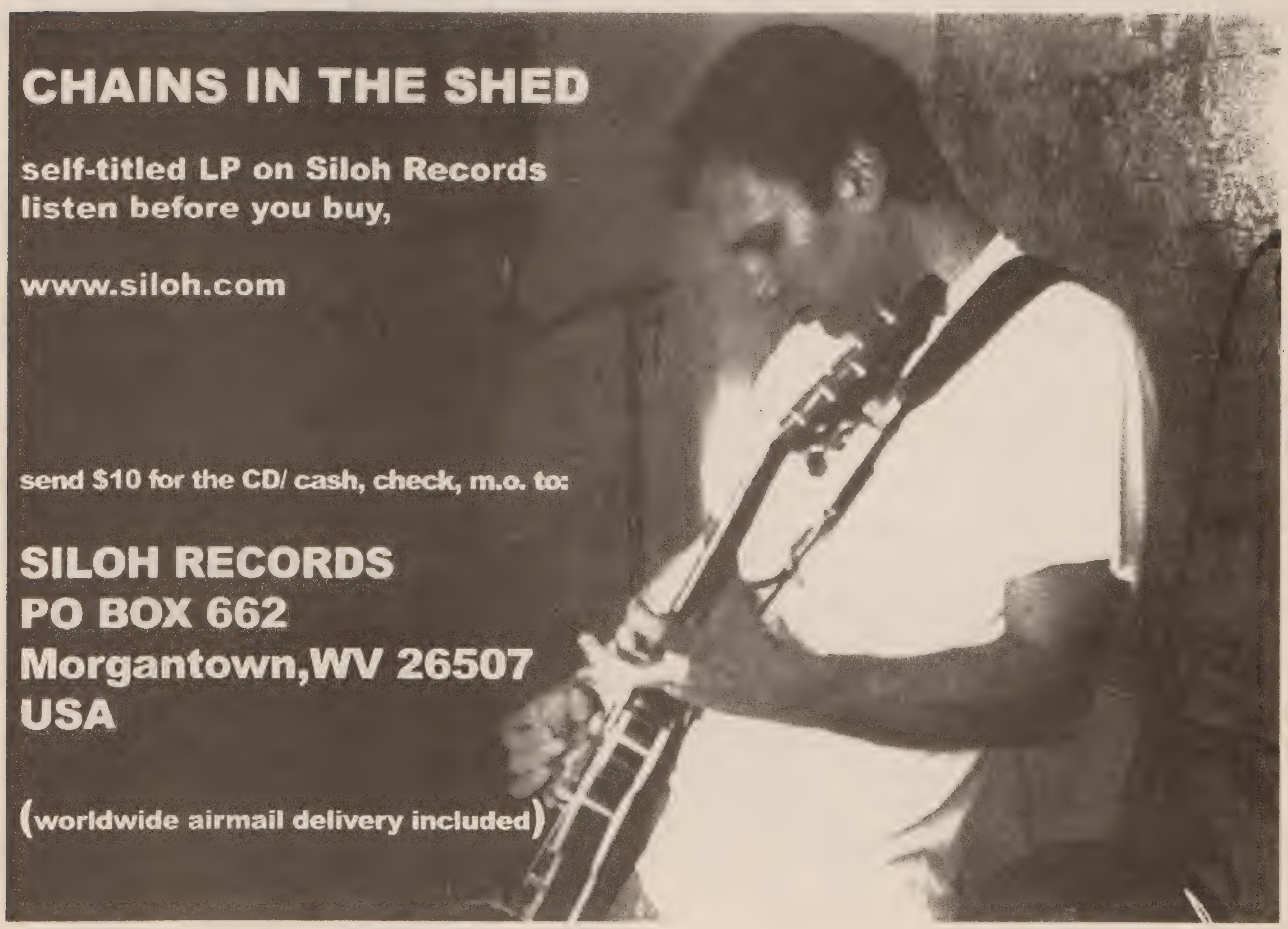
Ryan: (laughs) Sure, send 'em along.

Q: Are you comfortable with being the heartthrob in the band? That's actually an awful lot of that kind of thing on the website.

Ryan: I don't really think I am. I'm pretty ugly, I think. Mike and Frankie are the dreamy ones. Just look at their eyes. (laughs) But actually, I think there are an equal number of posts on the website about all of us. And what's wrong with that? That's why you get into a band. New fans and girls.

Visit Tripside at www.tripsideonline.com and be sure to check out Mike Zinn's photos at www.bandshots.com





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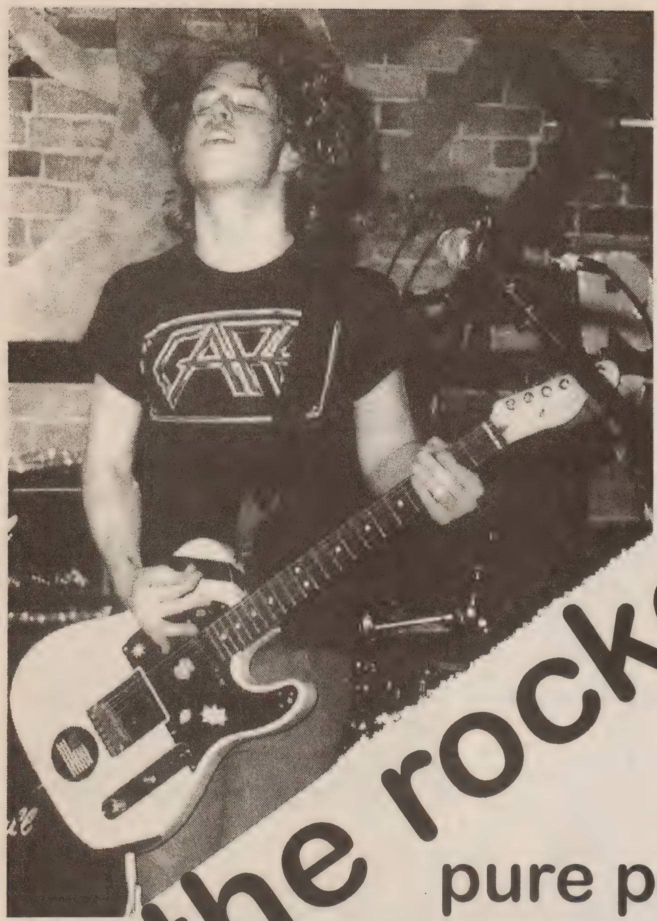

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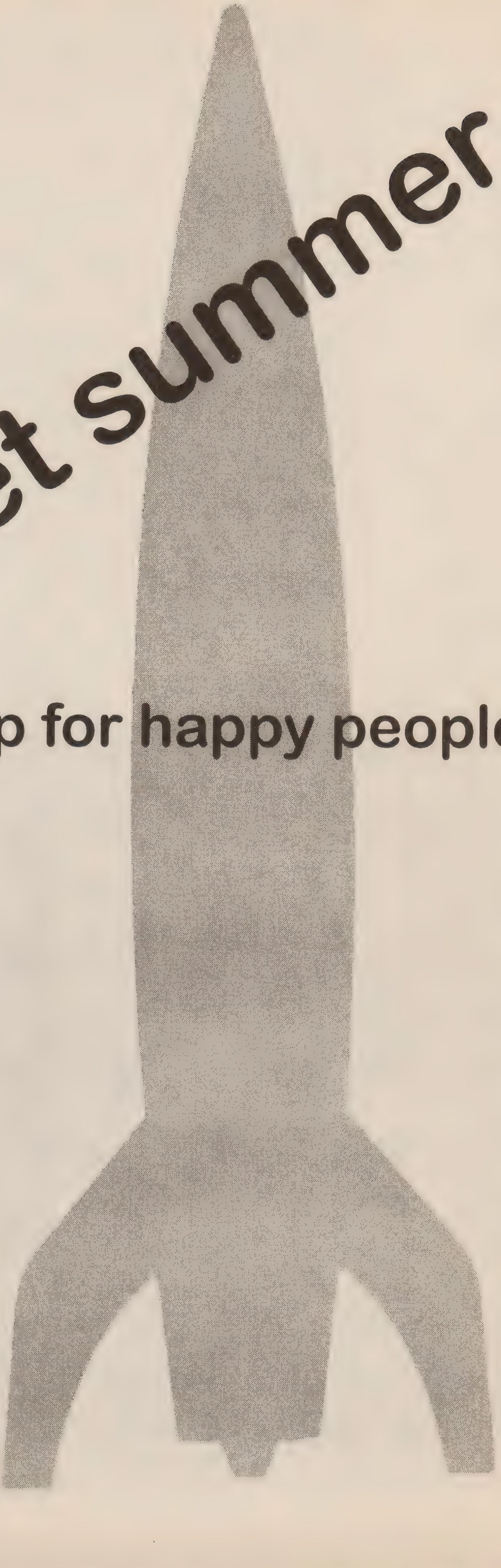


by Jim Testa

Imagine all three Hanson brothers wrapped up into one baby-faced blonde bundle of talent and you have an idea of Bryce Avery, who goes by the name The Rocket Summer. The 20-year old Texas-born songsmith (who could pass for 16) not only wrote all the songs on his debut full-length, *Calendar Days*, he also played all the instruments.

Bryce impressed me when I met him quite by accident at last year's SXSW Music Conference, where he played solo; he was back this year, sharing the stage with a friend named Rob, and let me tell you – he was good last year, but he's made a quantum leap in terms of stagecraft, presence, and songwriting. From his first song – which kicked off with an explosion of confetti showering the small club – the set just danced with bubbly melodies and fresh-faced adolescent energy. Bryce and Rob switched back and forth between drums, guitar, and keyboards, with backing tracks subtly adding an extra layer of harmony vocals, melody lines, and percussion. It was one of the best sets I've ever seen at SXSW, so I grabbed a quick interview the next day.

Q: Tell me about your home town, Colleyville. It sounds like this little hick town where everybody drives pickup trucks with shotgun racks in the back.

Bryce: No, not at all. It's a small big town. It's a nice place to be raised. It's in between Dallas and Fort Worth.

Q: How'd you get into music?

Bryce: I think I was 12 when I picked up the guitar. And then I started playing drums. Which I think I "got" a little better at first. I've only been playing keyboard for about a year. I really can't play any songs other than my own.

Q: And when did Bryce Avery become The Rocket Summer?

Bryce: I guess I was 16. For a while, I had just been playing shows as Bryce Avery and one day, I said, Gee, maybe I should name this something, and one of my friends said, How about the Rocket Summer, that's a cool name. It was something he had read in a book or something. And I said, hey, that's a cool name, let's go for it. I just thought it would be kind of cool to name it something.

Q: Watching the show last night, I felt like I was watching Hanson, only all three brothers were just one person.

Bryce: I don't know. It's just fun to mix it up and play different instruments.

Q: The music you play really isn't what most kids your age are listening to. How did you come up with that sound, and did you have any role models or particular influences? And how would you classify what you do. Power pop?

Bryce: I call it "driving melodic pop/rock."

Q: It's really not what most kids your age these days are listening to though.

Bryce: No, it's too happy. (laughs)

Q: Was there anyone or any band that pointed you in that direction?

Bryce: I don't think there was ever any bands that threw me in that direction. I've always just had this thing, since I picked up the guitar, where I'd play something and think, oh wow, that sounds happy. That's just what I liked to play and write about. As far as bands that have influenced me.... Oh, I don't know, there are so many. One record that I've always been in love with is Built To Spill's *There's Nothing Wrong With Love*. It's really good, it's really happy.

Q: How about Beach Boys stuff?

Bryce: Oh yeah, I love *Pet Sounds*. Of course. That's a standard answer for that.

Q: But you don't have any one hero or role model?

Bryce: No, not really. I've just been soaking it all in for a long time. Every band from Smashing Pumpkins to Nirvana to Built To Spill to the Beach Boys. I'm all over the place. I love the Dixie Chicks, even. (laughs)

Q: Well, you're from Texas, I guess you're allowed.

Bryce: I have a lot of country in me, I listen to it all the time.

Q: How did you hook up with The Militia Group?

Bryce: I've known those guys for a long time. And we had talked a long time ago. And after I recorded my album, I was shopping it and they just offered me a really good deal and I really liked them. I went there because there, I'm a priority, whereas on a major, if I wasn't selling a million records, I'd just be banished. I didn't sign my life away, by any means.

Q: Who was the guy you played with last night?

Bryce: His name is Rob. I hope he stays with me. He's in another band called Adventures Of Jet too. He's amazing. He's one of the greats in Texas, he knows everybody.

Q: That was a unique presentation last night, with the two of you constantly switching instruments. Is that how you're going to be touring from now on?

Bryce: Yeah, that was really scary, because we're used to a normal stage and that place was laid out kinda weird. But we just set everything up next to each other and went with it, and we rocked the house.

Q: How do you do the backing tracks?

Bryce: It's all on an A-DAT. I mixed it all down from the actual record.

Q: It was very subtle. I noticed that the tracks would come after you started and ended before you finished the song, so it was never obvious that you were playing along with backing tracks.

Bryce: Yeah, we do that deliberately. That's how we're going on tour for just a little bit. But I'm planning on adding someone every time we go out, so by the fourth time out, I'll have a full band. But for the first time out, I thought that was an interesting presentation. It keeps people's attention when you're not known. It did last night, for sure.

Q: I did notice last night that there are a couple of Jesus references in your songs. You're not a Christian Rock act by any means but you think of yourself as a Christian, right?

Bryce: Christian is 100% of what I am. It's more than anything. And I want everyone in the world to know that. I believe that's why we're here and I believe that's why I have this talent that I've been blessed with. But I don't want to be in the 'Christian scene.' That's not what I am. I think it's whatever you're called to do, and I feel that it's awesome when people want to do that, and dedicate their whole careers to playing to the Christian circuit, but I just feel that right now, I'm supposed to be doing this, in the normal 'secular' scene. I'm not saying that I'm in anyway holier than thou, because I'm not. And I know people are going to look at me like I'm that way, and I'm not by any means. But we're all the same, we're all just people. It's just what I am and it's what I want to do, but on the other hand, I'm not going to shove anything down anyone's throat. But I do want people to know I'm a Christian. Ever since I was a kid, when I became a Christian when I was younger, it seemed like all the Christian music that was out there was pretty lame. So I thought, I want to change that. I want everyone out there to know I'm a Christian, and I'll must play the same shows that everyone else plays. I'm not going to pigeonhole myself.

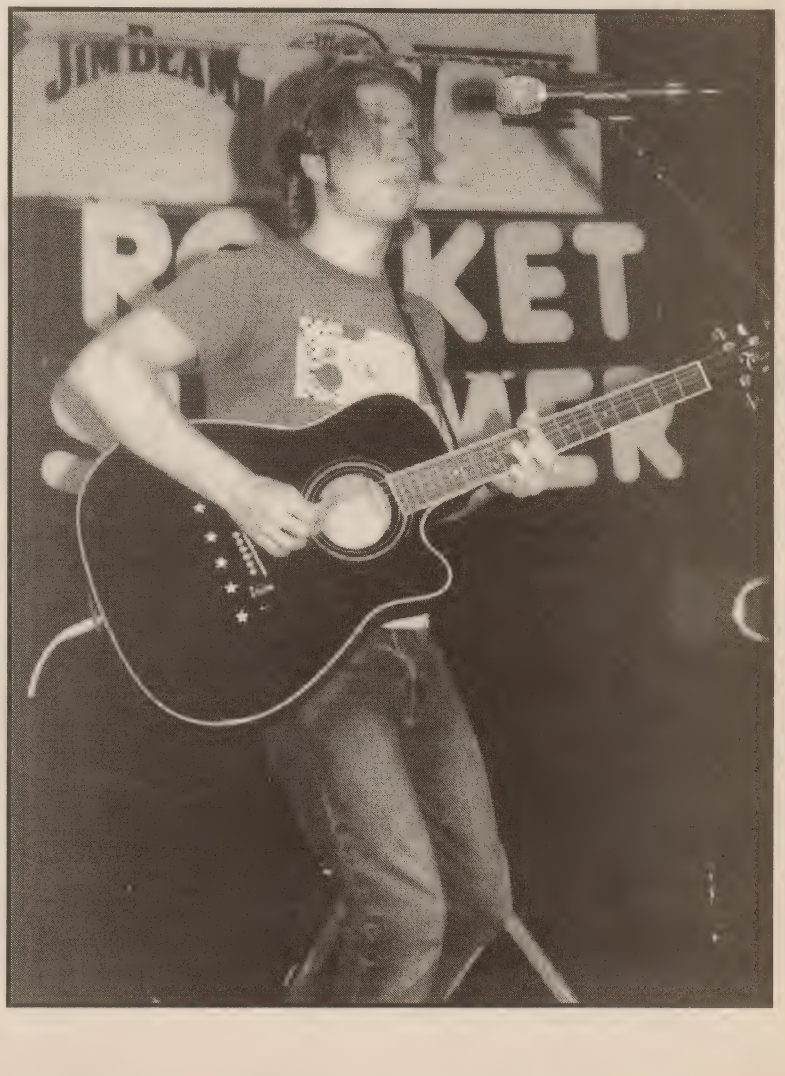
Q: So, 2003 The Rocket Summer, what should we be looking for?

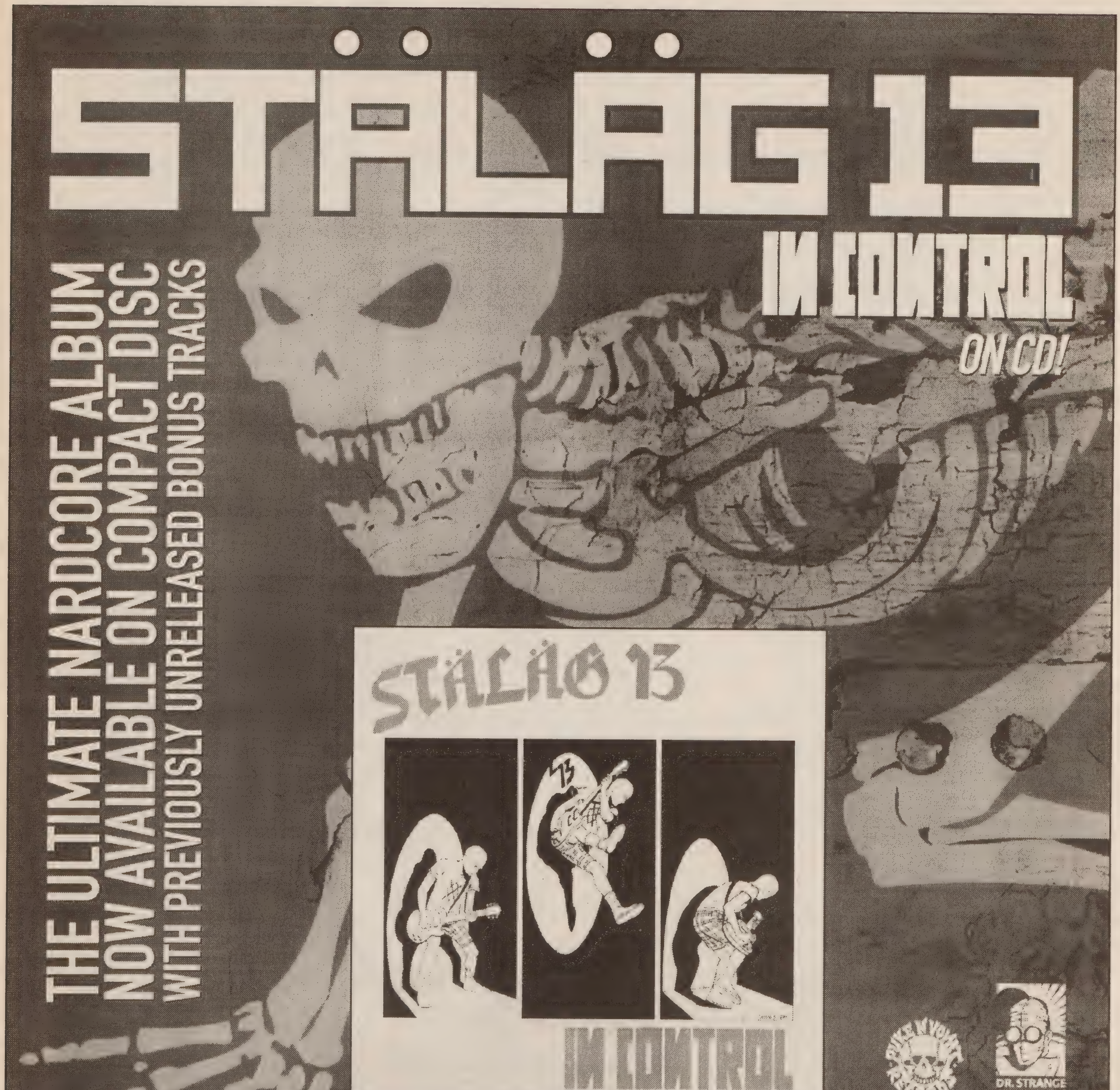
Bryce: A lot of touring and hopefully a lot of progress. I have a feeling that a year from now, a lot of things are going to be different. Knock on wood.

Q: Just don't stop being happy.

Bryce: (laughs) People always say to me that I'm the happiest person alive. And if you knew me well, you'd know that wasn't true. I just choose to write happy songs. But I'm just like any other person, I get angry and sad and whatever. You should have seen me this morning. We got lost driving here and I thought we weren't going to make the show, and I started screaming at everybody. I wasn't very happy then! But seriously, for now, I'm just happy writing this kind of music and watching people dance to it and stuff.

For more on Bryce Avery, visit www.therocketsummer.com

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KNUCKLE SANDWICH

By Jim Testa
Photos courtesy of the band

Philly has its cheesesteaks, Boston brags about its baked beans, and Coney Island still makes the best hot dogs anyplace. And then there's New Jersey, where the house specialty is the knuckle sandwich.

As you might guess about a band that takes its moniker from a shot in the kisser, KnuckleSandwich is a hardcore band, with roots back to the days when black eyes and bruises were synonymous with moshpits. That hint of bare-fisted brutality remains in the band's music, making KnuckleSandwich one of the most exciting bands in the state; there may be less bumps and bruises these days, but this band's high-energy, adrenaline-fueled (and surprisingly melodic) sound can still work a crowd into a lather; and surprisingly, it works just as well at a sophisticated indie-rock hangout like Maxwell's as at an all-ages VFW hall show. Add to that a strong DIY ethic that's helped built a loyal grassroots following throughout the tri-state area and Knucklesandwich emerges as one New Jersey band that's hard to duck.

This interview was conducted with lead singer Richie shortly before the band left on its first national tour in February.

1. Tell us who is in the band and give us a quick run-down of the band's history since you met and started playing together.

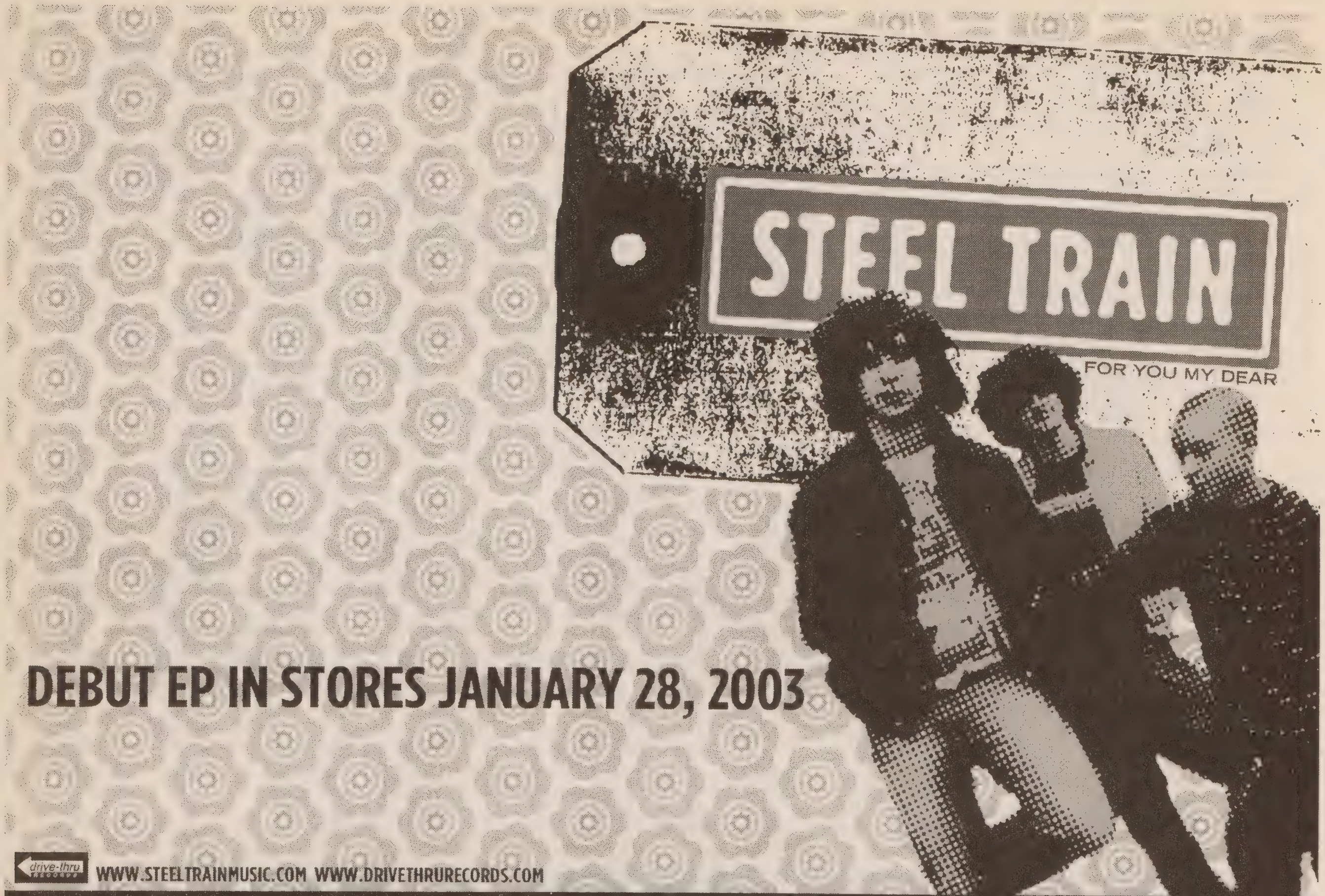
My brother Jason (Guitar) and I (vocals) started Knucklesandwich back in high school. We were more traditional hardcore, we were doing really well, (we played with some big names back in the day - Gorilla Biscuits, Biohazard, Leeway, Mucky Pup, Murphy's Law.) But for some reason, the bigger our crowds got, "beatdown" became synonymous with our shows, and it was not good. We made the mistake of changing our sound too drastically and it wrecked the band. We eventually broke up. One day, many years later, Mike (bass) and Avi (drums) - both huge fans of our first band - approached us about getting the band back together. Jay and I were dying to play again (watching bands we knew and started out with, achieving success, like Vision, Bouncing Souls, and Ensign.) So we wrote some new songs, and it all just clicked. Being from out in the boonies, and starting to play out again, we tested our material at our own shows I put together. I started throwing shows at a local Chinese restaurant called The King Bufet and soon they became legendary. (As well as Knuckle, we had Catch 22, Bigwig, and IDK amongst many others play that place.) We are very lucky in that our shows have always attracted great crowds. (I attest some of it has to do with the fact that there is not much to do out here in West Central NJ!!) Well, then we concentrated on playing mainly the Tri State area. We've played almost all the big-name NJ clubs: Maxwells in Hoboken, the Birch Hill, The Stone Pony, you name it we played there. We've played some big places in Philly and NYC too, like the Pontiac, the Trocadero, CBGB's, even the Hard Rock Café. We also put out a couple demos on my own indie label, Punch Records (www.punchrecordsonline.com.) We busted our asses and sold like 2000 copies of each at our shows alone! The great thing is this band has remained fun from the get go. In 2001, we then joined the legendary NJ hardcore label Resurrection AD. They have some great bands and they gave us a great opportunity to work with Eric Rachel at Trax East studios and record our *Nice* CD. It is our first "real" studio cd and we could not be happier. It came out great. Last month we completed our first ever music video for "American Song," and we are finally hitting the road on our first ever national tour. The last year has been really exciting.

2. Let's assume that most of the people reading this have never heard Knucklesandwich. What can they expect when they see you live, and how would that experience be different from just listening to your CDs?

For years our close friends and fans have always complained that we were unable to capture the live raw energy of a Knucklesandwich show on tape (until now.) But let's face it, it's the live show that counts. I would much rather hear we are better live than vice versa. We come from the DIY ethic where the band is on the ground (not up on some high stage) with tons of kids in a circle, fighting to grab the mike, finger-pointing to the ceiling, shouting the words!! It's what feeds our live show. I love the crowd interaction. Don't get me wrong, I take a lot of my frontman persona from the greats. I was a young kid who studied David Lee Roth and Ozzy instead of English and Math. You know, the Huge Arena Rock Gods. I thought that Iron Maiden was the extreme until at 14, I snuck out to see Suicidal Tendencies, and S.O.D. in Brooklyn. The next weekend, I snuck out to City Gardens in Trenton to see Black Flag. My heavy-metal posters were soon replaced by fanzine punk/hardcore photocopied show flyers, but the huge classic Eighties metal influence from my grammar school years is still evident in what I bring to our show. We have been labeled a punk band with Rock/Hardcore influences, but for the sake of this interview, lets just say we always rock out.... *hardcore.*

3. New Jersey is like most places, I guess, in that there's a distinct difference between the "21+ " club/bar scene for bands and the all-ages scene. Knucklesandwich is one of those rare bands that seems to have a presence in both scenes. Is that something you deliberately set out to do, and is it something that's difficult to maintain? Do you play different sets for younger and older audiences? Which audiences do you prefer playing to?

We were once described in a CD review as, "Imagine a Fat WreckChords band playing a bar, and there you have KnuckleSandwich." That one made me laugh. You can actually hear that



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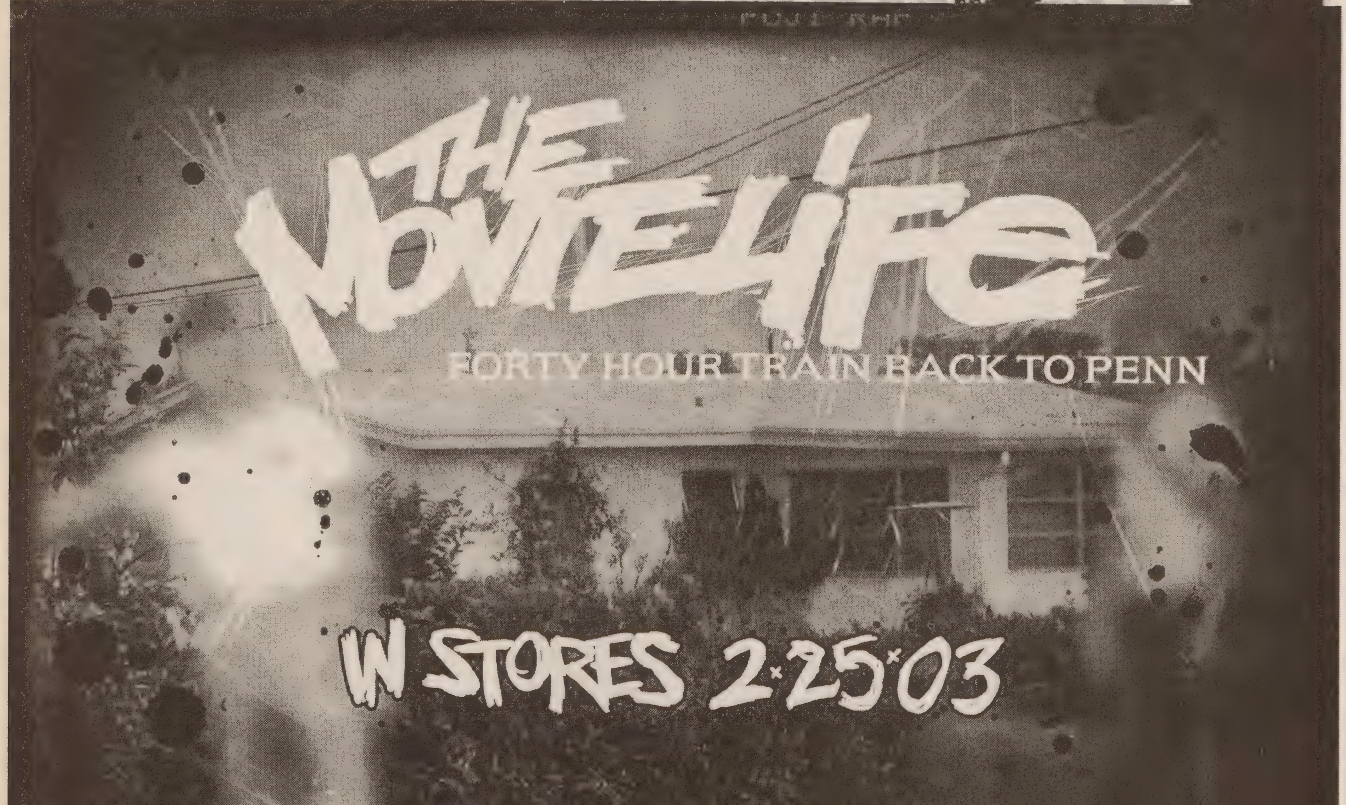

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from listening to a CD? *Very* interesting. I would much rather play an all ages show. I hate bars because of the cigarette smoke. But ya can't pigeonhole yourself. It has got to be done. We play the same songs regardless of whether it's a bar or not. We may throw some more covers in there if the bar crowd needs to be softened up a bit. We do a mean Judas Priest cover that always gets them rowdy. I really shouldn't speak for the whole band on this one. The Sawmill on the Seaside Heights boardwalk is 21+ and we have some of our best shows at that place. Big shout to my surfin' peeps at Ocean County surfing! But really, Knucklesandwich has been lucky to be able to cross over to both scenes. But I prefer All Ages.

4. The name Knucklesandwich conjures up a tough-guy image. Hardcore was much tougher and the shows more violent and the kids more aggressive in the Eighties, when bands like Vision ruled the scene. Do you find the new "emo" generation to be lacking that kind of energy and aggression, and would you like to see more of it in the NJ punk scene? How do NJ audiences compare to other places you've been?

Holy shit! See question #1 I did not read ahead!! I swear!! We are on the same page!!! Not many Emo kids even know about Knucklesandwich yet. We hardly tapped into that scene. Speaking of pigeonholing, I think our name sorta blocks us from that whole entire market. You can tell an emo band just by the name. I hate that fact. I sometimes dislike our name cause of the preconceived notion of the whole tough guy crap. There has got to be a reason why such an amazing band like Thursday came from a town only a half-hour from us, and we have never played on the same bill or even fucking met! They are so hot right now and I see their sweatshirts and t-shirts everywhere I go, but I cant remember the last time I saw a kid wearing one at one of our shows!! I notice shit like that and wonder why. About the kids today "lacking that kind of energy and aggression?" No way!! Come to one of our "Punch Records" local shows. Or download our video for "American Song" at www.knucklesandwich.com. Our New Jersey following i as hardcore insane as it has ever been. We filmed a live show for the video and it shows the chaos of a hometown Knuckle show. The kids today rule. And about comparing, I have to admit that February 2003 marks our first tour ever. We have only played NY/NJ/PA. We leave for Cailifornia on Feb 13th with our friends in Radical Record's 5 Cent Deposit stopping in almost every state along the way!

5. Where are some of your favorite venues, and what places do you hate to play? Has Knucklesandwich done much touring, and if so, what have been some of your favorite cities to visit?

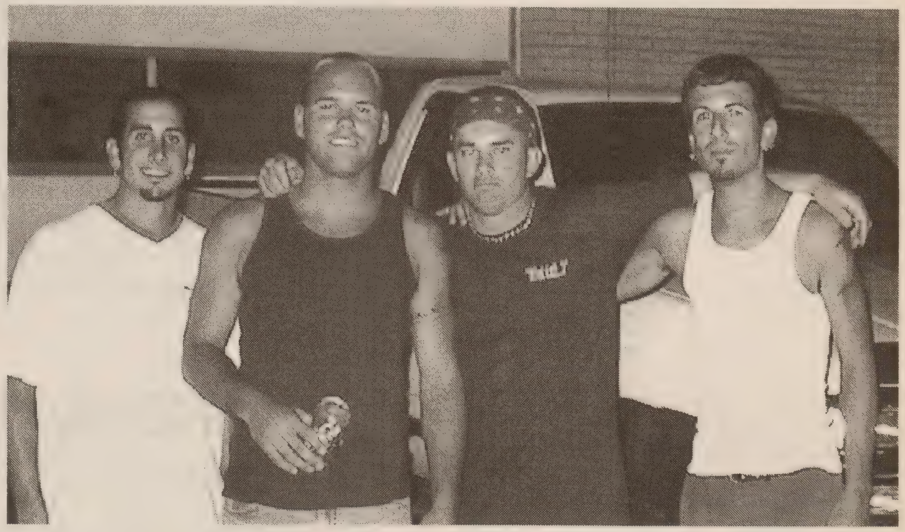
Like I said we have never really toured yet. We have been playing the Tri-state area for years and since our first CD *Nice* on Resurrection-AD records came out last June and is selling so damn well, we have not played a single show without tons of peeps getting nuts. We have been blessed. NJ is the shit! I cant think of a single venue where we have had a bad experience. I have heard that the road is awesome and NJ is so tough compared to the rest of the US, so I am stoked and I have high expectations. I know of a bunch of crazy NJ fucks who are following us city to city so it should be quite a trip. Not to mention thanx to the Internet, for years we have kept in touch with out of state fans who wanted to know why we never come to play their town. If I get to meet half of the people I have been corresponding with via email over the years, it is gonna be a great time. Also 5 Cent Deposit kick ass so we are looking fwd to partying w/them.

6. So much punk today is either very personal (emo) or silly (pop punk), there is very little political content left in the music. How does Knucklesandwich feel about the role of politics in punk, and more specifically, how do you feel about the impending war with Iraq?

I write all the lyrics, so the lyrics are my opinions and not the bands per se. Living in the suburbs of NJ you can only write what ya live and breathe. "American Song" came to me obviously after the tragic events of 9/11. After bashing the government on songs like "Sucker," "Amber Waves of Green" and especially "Doublespeak," and loving NYC as much as I do, I felt it was time to throw a curve ball and flip the coin. I tend to write easy-to-singalong songs about what inspires me and what I am feeling. I have loved ones who live in both cities, NYC and DC, so I was really taken aback that day. I gotta tell ya, I have taken a lot of heat about that song but if you take the time and read deeper into the lyrics, you will see I am no "bandwagon patriot". Most of the lyrics are still tongue in cheek, still taking pokes at George
W and Bill Clinton along the way. It's really just a tribute to those who died in the attacks. Being the first track and having such a catchy chorus, it sorta stands out like a huge flag waving. I come from a great home and had a great upbringing. So I mostly write positive songs. I am proud to live in this country and enjoy all its freedoms, but once again, I am open minded enough to realize there are two sides to every coin. If I had time to sit down and read every book with every viewpoint on the Middle East crisis, maybe I would have never written that song. I have nothing other than the TV, books, and newspapers to form my own personal politics. I consider myself intelligent, but I definitely don't have the answers. I sometimes think I should just write all songs about drinking beer. It's much safer. Ya don't really piss anyone off that way. What... oh yeah, the SXE kids. DAMN! (Just kidding)

7. Knucklesandwich already has a fairly long history for a local punk band. Where do you see yourselves in five or ten years? Do you think you could see yourselves signing to a major label, like Midtown or Thursday (to name two NJ bands on majors...)

This is getting scary!!! Where do we see ourselves in five or ten years?? Hmmmmm. I can only hope successful, still with some street cred. We have been able to survive and be accepted (with obviously pop oriented songs) in a "NJHC eat the weak scene" by being brutally honest and sincere. If we ever were ever able to sign to a major, we would have to be really careful. A band like us could easily end up to be a one hit wonder/joke. Just picture it, bad Knucklesandwich merch with a fist and a hamburger bun, a real corny video with a fridge full of 40's, and BAM!! we become the next Twisted Sister. Sorry I got carried away. I said it before, I'll say it again, For me it's all about the energy of the music, the intimacy of the seedy small nightclub packed with sweaty crazy fuckers looking to interact/connect with their favorite band. To take something home with them. Not about the money or the fame or the fashion. But on the other hand, to date some famous hot chicks would be nice too.



8. Name 5 songs that would make great Knucklesandwich covers, and explain why:

AGGGGGGH!!!!!! Stop it!!! We sometimes toss these 5 classic metal covers into our set!!
"You Got another Thing Comin'" by Judas Priest (Classic Metal song dying to be done in a hardcore style) "Runaway" and "Wanted Dead Or Alive" by Bon Jovi (NJ all the way!! A sick circle pit always ensues during those two songs! Yeah, that's right, Bon Jovi!! I dare ya to bust my balls) "Lounge Act" by Nirvana (We were asked to be on a Nirvana tribute CD with BigWig and Stick Figure Suicide and this was the only song fuckin left, who the hell even ever heard the original, but regardless, we recorded that song and gave it some balls, Sick of it all/No Redeeming Social Value style.)
...and last but not least, Twisted Sister's "I Wanna Rock!" I dissed Dee and TS on question #7 (not seriously-I am a fan) and that song inspired our own cheese metal anthem, "Show me the Rock" I tried to get Dee to play it on his radio show, House of Hair, but he never answered my fan mail. Maybe he got tossed off the air before he heard it.

9. What can we look forward to from KS in 2003?

Hopefully a full year of touring and finally some new music. We have not had a lot of time to write. So hopefully on the long drives we will write some new tunes. Also, we just did a music video for American Song and it came out so good I really wanna do another one. I have a great concept for our song, "Show me the Rock," but I ain't tellin'.

10. Where can fans contact you and find out about shows, merch, etc?

I will have wireless email for my laptop on tour so my email addy is punchrecords@rcn.com and our websites are www.knucklesandwich.com www.knucklesandwich.net & my scene site is www.punchrecordsonline.com. Punch Online is a site where our local scene goes to get all the info on the central NJ bands shows.

www.punchrecordsonline.com www.knucklesandwich.com

The Search For A Name Tour

Val Emmich & Drew Iselib meet America... one couch at a time

It's hard to find a suitable name for a tour before it begins. Often it correlates to a record that a band is trying to promote. Or it has to do with some goal that the artist hopes to achieve while on this tour. And of course, sometimes it's just some ridiculous title that sounds funny. Well, in this case, since we are two separate artists with separate goals and separate sounds, we decided to avoid naming the tour as a whole and just name each and every show based on unique things that happened each night. So in turn our tour became known as "The Search For A Name Tour." Also, the fact that we are both in essence trying to make a "name" for ourselves in the music industry added another layer of meaning to our title. Okay, so here goes. *SPECIAL THANKS to all of you who took us in.*

DAY 1: THU DEC 5 – SOMERSET, NJ –THE DEAD END

THE SHOW THAT NEVER WAS SHOW

DREW

Our first show got snowed out. With all our extra time, Val and I went out for his brother's 21st birthday, and worked on learning a couple of each other's songs. Then I went to bed on a mattress on the floor (that according to Val's housemate, Andy, had seen copious amounts of wild sex.)

VAL

This first show was scheduled to be at this house venue called The Dead End that is run by a bunch of guys that used to be in a Jersey indie-rock band called Dewey Defeated. It got cancelled due to snow. So instead Drew and I visited my brother who goes to Rutgers University in New Brunswick, NJ. That night at midnight, he was to turn 21 and we were there to help him celebrate. Drew and I didn't really know each other at this point. So this was our first real opportunity to have a few beers and chat. We were already committed to spending two and a half weeks together in a car so it was time to find out if we going to get along or bat heads. We learned two things that night 1) we didn't really feel comfortable with the college crowd anymore and 2) we were going to get along real well.

DAY 2: FRI DEC 6 – NEW YORK, NY - New York University

THE WAKE UP SORRY SHOW

DREW

(I awoke, still drowsy from strange dreams about Andy in leather) Val and J packed up the truck and made our way out of Jersey into the city. It occurred to me during the drive, that after spending two and half weeks in a confined space with a virtual stranger, that Val would either be a new really good friend, or someone I never wanted to see again for the rest of my life. We found a parking "spot" around 6. With all of our gear, we lumbered a few freezing blocks to the dorm. Our host, Donna, signed us in, we took the elevator up, moved some furniture around and went out to buy beer. We rushed past the security guard with large and clinking bags. By 9 there were about 30 people packed into the dorm room. The room lights were dimmed and the Xmas lights that circled the room were plugged in. Since I had played this type of show before, I offered to go first. I thanked everyone for coming and I felt strangely comfortable (read as: I had been drinking). The crowd was young, drunk and attentive, which is just about a perfect combination. Some people sang along, somebody cried. After a fifteen-minute break, Val went on. He had to deal with a slightly louder and drunker (and technically older) crowd. Once he got people's attention, he sucked them in. He kicked ass. Some of my hard-to-impress friends that were there were impressed. I was impressed too. Afterwards, we went out to a bar and got more wasted. When we got back to the dorm we stepped over a passed out guy in the lobby, went up stairs, unrolled our sleeping bags, talked dirty to our hosts, and fell asleep.

VAL

So our first show is now in New York City in a NYC dorm room. It was a room occupied by 4 female college students. All very sweet. They made us feel at home. There were around 25 people crammed into what I guess was a sort of living room area. Earlier, while eating dinner at Wendy's in Jersey, we had decided that since Drew had done this sort of thing before (last summer '02, he went on a 40 day couch tour across the US by himself) that he would go first and show me how it was done. He let me know that it sometimes could be nerve-racking to actually start to play for people in such close quarters with no stage to separate the performer from the audience and no microphone to help you project your voice and no amplifier to help the acoustic be heard. I thought this was a good idea, letting him go first. Drew started. People were already pretty buzzed, including Drew and it was a little hard to get people to quiet down at first. But Drew soon grabbed their attention. After his set, I did my thing. There was a good response. Sold a bunch of CDs. Then after the show, we went out to a bar with a bunch of people. It was 6 am by the time we actually wrapped ourselves in our sleeping bags on the cold, hard linoleum college-dorm room floor. We were going to sleep in a room that was home to four young ladies. Drew said that he wanted to sleep naked and the girls started makng little jokes. Things got real nasty. Nothing happened but there was a lot of teasing. Anyway, when we both woke up we felt dirty. Like we were too drunk and we said things we didn't mean.

DAY 3: SAT DEC 07 – BLACK ROCK, CT-THE GREEN ROOM

THE SUICIDAL PUPPETS SHOW

DREW

This show is titled for a Mexican gun-slinging puppet named Pedro who is not for sale. Pedro lives on a shelf in a bar called the Green Room, which happened to be a perfect place for the Couch Tour. The décor is that of a comfortable, dimly lit, cleverly arranged thrift store. Essentially everything (excluding Pedro) that decorates the walls and furnishes the bar is for sale. (It could be this competition that explained my CD sales) The stage is in the center of the bar against one wall, and it is surrounded on the other three sides by mix matched sofas and easy chairs. Val played first. He is a tough act to follow, very solid. This was the first time I saw what we later recognized as a bar raising performance. He would play well and make me have to play better and vice-versa. When it was my turn to play, again I felt strangely comfortable. I tried out a Phil Ochs cover, "I Ain't Marching Anymore" and it went over well. Tony Senes, an excellent keyboard player from the Cosmic Jibaros, came up to accompany me for my last song ("God Damn") and he rocked. The Cosmic Jibaros rocked next. Val and I played with Pedro, invented a game with dice with no real point, and then I used my psychic powers to guess what card Val had pulled from a deck of cards. (Queen of Clubs, no shit) Then we had pork chops.

VAL

Even though our tour was mostly a tour of people's homes, occasionally we played in actual venues. This show was in a place called the Green Room. I fell in love with it the moment I walked in the room. Couches and cushioned seats were adequately sprawled throughout the space, while antique art and dusty old hardcover books lined the walls. The stage was just big enough for a couple of lonely singer-songwriters. I wanted to pick the whole venue up in my arms and bring it back to Jersey and make it my staple venue. My set consisted of two songs from *Slow Down Kid* ("The Boy Who Cried Wolf" and "Shock"), two new songs ("There is you or there is chaos" and "Not alright"), "Try Me" from *The Fifteen Minute Relationship* EP, and a Freedy Johnston cover called "Bad Reputation." Drew helped me out with some percussion on "Shock." Then it was Drew's turn. After him, was a band called the Cosmic Jibaros which were a latin-tinged rock outfit. Very talented. The place was packed by the time they took stage. Meanwhile, Drew and I found this old marionette named Pedro. Pedro wore a sombrero, had a big moustache, and carried a revolver. Drew and I fell in love with him. We snapped pics of him in different suicidal poses. After the show, we approached the bartender and tried to purchase him but regretfully he was not for sale. She said: "Everything in this place is for sale, except Pedro."

DAY 4: SUN DEC 08 – BOSTON, MA MIKE, MARIA, AND CLARE'S COUCH

THE TAILS SHOW

DREW

In Boston, we met Buttercup our first tour dog. She was a year and a half year old Chow-Shepherd mix, with a really crappy name. This crowd was made mostly of my college friends. They made a fire. We drank beer. For reasons I can't quite remember, on this particular night, we flipped a coin to see who would play first. It came up tails meaning Val would start off. The more I heard Val's stuff the more I liked it. He won over the room quickly. This was the first night that we tried the harmonies that we had worked out on each other's songs. They sounded pretty good. Having college friends there meant that they made me play songs I hadn't played in a couple of years. They were weak, but nostalgia inducing. At one point, I called my friend Gandhar (El Secondhand), so he could sing harmonies over the speakerphone. It was tough to convince him, but he finally agreed. After a song, he said "guys I really have to go. I'm here with my study group." Afterwards a big book of Beatles songs surfaced and we proceeded to butcher some of the greatest songs ever written. Then it was to an Irish Pub. Then to bed, where I had a dream about a little girl with peanut butter on her hands and a lot of screaming.

VAL
The ride to Boston was very quick due to the extremely intense conversation Drew and I were having: my family's dark past, his confusion about his current romantic situation. It felt good to open up. Both of us claimed to be poor at opening up. We flipped a coin to see who would play first that night. I won. Or I lost, rather. I was going to go first which I found intimidating since the crowd was 15 of Drew's college buddies. Also present was an adorable mutt named Buttercup. The thing about house shows that you don't experience in a club is a dog coming up to your guitar while you are performing and barking at it uncontrollably. You have to learn to play through everything and that was a first for me. Drew, on the other hand, happens to be really good at overcoming distractions. While I wait until everyone is quiet and ready, Drew just starts playing and forces them to shut up. I opened up with "The Boy Who Cried Wolf" again. It felt safe to me. It would soon become my standard opener for the remainder of the tour. I felt real nervous in front of this particular crowd. How does one get a crowd going if one is playing mainly sad, depressing songs? Drew and I don't exactly play party music. Nonetheless, I did okay. I sold a bunch of CDs. The main thing that changed my mood and made me feel better was Drew letting me know that even though he originally thought my songs were "good," he now after a few nights of shows thought my songs were "great." Good to great. This set the pattern for the rest of the tour for Drew and I. The tour became about competing with each other in a friendly way. Forcing each other to play at the top of our game every night. Pushing each other further. Outdoing each other. If we couldn't win each other over, how were we ever going to win over the crowd?

Drew - NYU dorm, kickoff of the tour

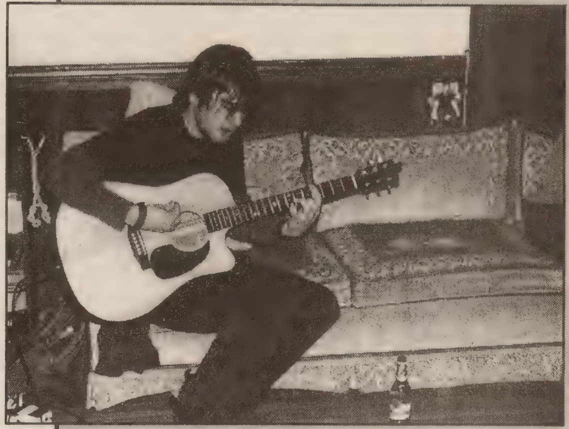
Pedro the Puppet, The Green Room

DAY 5: MON DEC 09 -- NARRAGASETT, RI -- HOLIDAY HOUSE

THE FERNLEAF HOLIDAY SHOW

DREW
We rolled up to Holiday's house having no idea what to expect. We got this show through Hero Pattern, so neither of us knew anyone who lived there. We called from the road to see if we should stop at a liquor store. They said "Don't bother, we have a keg." Instantly visions of frat boys and funnels filled our heads. Thankfully, it was a very different story. The guys from Holiday (Holidaytheband.com) were some of the nicest guys I've met. We watched the Billboard Music Awards and bonded over our shared hatred of Creed. I set up and started yelling. I'm not sure why, but I felt like I yelled through every song. Nerves were a factor this time, but people applauded and seemed to be in to it. By the end of the set I felt really good. Then Val played. It was interesting for me to hear the same relationship bug outs he was having in the car, surface in his songs. (I wish I could tell the whole story, but you probably need two and a half weeks to hear the whole thing. In short, a beautiful, older, foreign woman with a sexy accent had taken over his thoughts and tormented him with her aloofness.) My shins were sore from toe tapping. Then, in a car blasting The Who, we went out to a bar and got drunker. Next, we went to a greasy late night food place, where we waited forever for our food. When I was given the wrong order the guy behind the counter said, "Oh, I heard you point to calzone."

VAL
Heading to Rhode Island, Drew and I became aware of the fact that this next show was going to be our first show at which we knew absolutely no one. We didn't know what to expect. We were heading the house of this band called Holiday who we had met through my Jersey friends Hero Pattern. Holiday had heard the split EP that I did with Hero Pattern and invited Drew and I to play. We were pleasantly surprised to find a house full of warm, kind people. It was our biggest crowd yet - 25 people. It felt really good while playing because a bunch of the people in the audience were familiar with my songs from the split EP and so they sang along. I played all four songs from the disc. After the show, Dylan, from Holiday, took us out to a bar. He was very eager to show us a good time. He drove us around town blasting the Who's "Baba O'Reilly." A very, very cool kid. Anyway, the street they lived on was called Fernleaf Dr.


Val, another couch, this time in Boston

DAY 6: TUE DEC 10 -- NEW HAVEN, CT- COOPER PLACE

THE CARROT ON THE STICK SHOW

DREW
I felt very comfortable at this show, namely because it was at my house. My roommate, Tony, and I had been working on turning the basement into a studio. This was its debut as a social gathering place. With its dim red lighting, mauve carpet, and maroon and clay colored walls, the basement served as a very cozy spot for a show. I think Val and I both played excellent sets. Our harmonies sounded tight. Tony accompanied me on "The Entertainer." "The Entertainer" is an organ that Tony found in the trash. It looks like something that belongs in your grandmother's house, but it rocks. Jay Russell, from Hot Rod Circuit, was there sporting a lovely/tremendous moustache. He played a set of great folk originals. We're trying to see if maybe he'll come out on a future Couch Tour.

VAL
I was feeling shitty all day. Didn't feel like playing or being on tour or doing anything at all really. But then I started drinking. And drinking. Then the audience showed up. Mostly musicians: a bunch of the guys from the Cosmic Jibaros, Jay Russell from Hot Rod Circuit. I knew I had to play well cuz musicians are notoriously not easily impressed. By the time I started, I had a really good buzz on and the response after the first song was outrageous. I don't know if I was screwed up or what but people were openly commenting about the song and about me as if I wasn't there. Just talking. All really good things. I played "Future Boy" by Catherine Wheel for the first time ever. Drew played really passionately and his set became a

Val & Drew at Winter WE Fest

real communal experience as people were singing along to the choruses of songs like "You were a song." Sammy from the Cosmic Jibaros played bongos and Jay and I harmonized with Drew. Then Jay, normally a bassist with Hot Rod Circuit, played a few songs of his own on acoustic guitar. They were really cool. Gentle and folky. He told us he wanted to hop in the car with us and join us on our tour. He said he really dug what we were doing. This made me feel energized. After the show, Drew, his roommate Tony, and I had an intense conversation about how much we were inspiring each other. Discussing how important to play with people who are better than you at certain things and how it forces you to improve on your weaker points. We were egging each other on. Tangling the carrot on the stick.

DAY 7: WED DEC 11 – BETHESDA, MD – JON AND AMY'S COUCH

THE SUPER MONKEY BALL SHOW

DREW

New Haven to Bethesda was our first drive of any length. Maryland was the first show south of Jersey. It was nice to really feel like were moving into new territory. However, we couldn't see any of it because the pouring rain allowed for about three and a half inches of visibility. We showed up and Amy made us pizza. No cheese for me. I have no tolerance for lactose. This was our most intimate show because we were all naked. I felt good and I played some songs that I hadn't tried yet. Val ate too much and was feeling a little sick, but still did a fine job. Then we got messed up and played video games (in Val's entry you might hear something about smoking opium, but he doesn't know what he's talking about on account of all that opium). We played Super Monkey Ball, which is basically a monkey in a ball that is super. At some point, I made an intoxicated call to my then-girlfriend, which necessitated the following follow up call: "Hi Liz, it's me. I love you. Please disregard our conversation. Thanks Bye"

VAL

Bethesda is right outside of Washington, DC. To get there we drove through torrential rains. When we arrived, our host Amy served us a warm meal of homecooked pizza, pasta, and chocolate milk. I ate and ate. I couldn't stop eating. Before this meal it had been Wendy's and Denny's. A homecooked meal is hard to come by on the road. I usually don't like to eat before a gig because I am unable to sing well with a full stomach. Yet I couldn't resist. The apartment was spacious. Amy and her boyfriend John lived there. At first I was disappointed when only 6 people showed up for the show but I soon found it to be a blessing. It was by far our smallest show thus far but we needed a brake. It ended up being really cool. Everyone bought CDs. Afterwards, we just hung out listening to Modest Mouse and Built To Spill "Live" on vinyl while we played "Super Monkey Ball on Nintendo Gamecube over and over and over again. Drew and I were addicted. As I was laying down to go to bed that night, Drew was still sitting in front of the TV, hang-gliding his monkey over the sea towards the landing pad. That sounds really weird and slightly sexual. I urge you to play the game yourself and try to turn it off.

DAY 8: THU DEC 12 – GREENSBORO, NC – CAITIE'S COUCH

THE "AM I NORMAL?" SHOW

DREW

By this point, Val and I had firmly established our eating strategy that we referred to as the "Uni-Meal." It pretty much is what it sounds like, one big meal that keeps us full all day. Today's meal was Denny's. I had fried shrimp. Yum. We had also become thoroughly caffeine addicted. In the interest of time, we decided to go through a Wendy's Drive-Thru for coffee. This was hands down the worst coffee I have ever had. It tasted like a mix of cardboard and gasoline and no amount of sugar could save it. I don't know if it was something in the coffee or the music, but during the Sigur Ros album Val and I individually had extreme emotional reactions, visions and quasi-religious experiences. It sounds ridiculous, but it would sound more ridiculous if I spoke more about it, so I won't. A couple of blocks from "Der Wagon Hous"- Servicers of Fine Japanese Cars, we parked the car and entered Caitie's house. The smell of Vegan BBQ filled the air. It was excellent. In addition to Val and Me, the band "Health" played. They are a guitar, bass and sometimes keyboard duo that sings dark, incredibly good and slow songs. We all decided that we'd play three songs and rotate. Everyone was pretty drunk and rowdy. They busted Val's balls about having been on TV and things like that, but I think he won them over. As far as being a quiet and attentive crowd, they were poor, but as far as having a really good time went, they were excellent. We got drunk, took turns playing, then watched sex-ed videos.

VAL

A beautiful day to drive. The complete antithesis of yesterday. Clear blue skies. We cruised steadily for a few hours. Then, as the sun started setting and the sky was a swirl of orange and purple, we stopped for the crappiest cup of coffee either one of us has ever had. This is important because it may have been the coffee that was responsible for what came next. We got back in the car, put in the new Sigur Ros CD and started driving straight into the setting sun. When the first song ended (about 8 minutes later), I looked at Drew and told him that I just had a really weird experience. My face was numb. My eyes were bugging out of my head. I was driving steady at 90mph. I did not feel conscience. Felt like I was floating, having some kind of spiritual transcendental experience. It should be mentioned at this point that we hadn't taken any drugs or anything, just that cup of coffee and the CD. Drew told me he was going through the same thing. I don't believe in shit like this. I just don't. But whatever was happening, we were both experiencing it. Maybe we were just both tired. But I kept thinking about this article I read in CMJ New Music Report about how people have claimed to have these weird, physical reactions when present at a Sigur Ros concert. Hard to believe. I thought these people were wackos. But it happened to both of us. When it got dark a half-hour later, the feeling passed and we both felt incredibly exhausted. Which brings me to the show. About 25 people showed up. It seemed to be a slightly more indie-rock crowd then we had since experienced so we decided to try something new. Instead of us both doing one set, we decided to each play 3 songs, and then keep taking turns until it got old. Also, this two man band called Health (think Low) joined in the rotation. There was something intimidating about the crowd. At first they were unresponsive. Then one of them asked me "Hey, weren't you in a soap-opera" and everyone started laughing hard. I said: "Yeah. This next song is about hating your job even though it pays you a lot of money. It's called 'Rat Race.'" After that, I seemed to have one them over. It got a big applause. The night ended with a couple of us watching instructional sex education videos from the Fifties and Sixties. One of the girls there worked for Planned Parenthood and brought them over. One was called "Am I Normal?" That's the same question I was asking myself earlier in the car while tripping out to Sigur Ros and the same thing I was asking myself when I sat bewildered in front of the audience after the non-reaction to my first song.

DAY 9: FRI DEC 13 – WILMINGTON, NC- BESSIE'S

THE YELLOW RACKET SHOW

DREW

In Wilmington, everyone is attractive. Unfortunately, not everyone goes to see Drew and Val at the Winter WE Fest. It was a small, but good crowd. It was an audience made mostly of other musicians being supportive. The sound at Bessie's is great, and the guy who set up the WE Fest, Kenyata, seemed like a really good guy. That being said, the real story of Wilmington came after we played. Val and I were both fading fast, but wanted to show the same kind of support to the other bands as we had been shown. At some truck stop-Flying J type place, we had purchased these pills to help keep you up, "Yellow Jackets." We figured now would be a good time for them. After about 20 minutes we were running around like ADHD kids on coke. We played speed-pool. The rules of which seemed to be that neither you nor the balls were allowed to stop moving at any time. We ran into the street, and struck up a conversation with some drunken, Southern Marines. The fact that we didn't get beat up is impressive. Jim Testa, editor of this magazine and all around nice guy, had opened up the festival the night before. He was still in Wilmington, and he generously invited us to crash in his hotel room. Cracked out and sharing a bed, Val and I were going to have a hard time falling asleep one way or the other, but add Jim's audio terrorism to the recipe and you get a whole lot of not sleeping. As I lay awake staring at the ceiling, I searched for colorful yet accurate ways to describe the noises Jim made. My favorite description is a man with a leaf blower, being fired out of a cannon, into a wall of car horns. At around 5 in the morning, Val remembered that he had a couple sets of earplugs. Even with earplugs, I could hear Jim snore and Val faintly cursing.

VAL

Bessie's is a sizeable club complete with pool tables, air hockey & foosball, not to mention a really good sound system. This was my fourth WE Fest so I knew what to expect, however this was the first one being held in the winter and not the summer. Drew and I were scheduled to open up the night. We started a half-hour late cuz no one was there. When Drew started there were about 20 spectators there. Drew sounded great over the PA system. I was excited to hear the voice real clear through a speaker. It had been a while. After his 5 songs, I did my 5. I was really drunk this night. I was dancing, fluttering, and sputtering. Also on the bill was Brooklyn's Me Not No, The Flashing Astonishers from Syracuse, The Forms and I forget the last band. Drew and I had picked up some ephedrine (a.k.a. trucker's speed) in a local convenience store a few days before and we were ready to take them. They were called Yellow Jackets. I was very speedy. Drew and I played speed pool in which the rules stipulated that one must take their next shot within 5 seconds. Jim Testa let us crash in his hotel room that night. While Jim lay there in a deep sleep, Drew and I stayed up all night, unable to slow our minds down and unable to quiet down the racket in our heads.

DAY 10: SAT DEC 14 - PIEDMONT, SC -- KATIE AND PORTER'S COUCH

THE BLANK SHOW

DREW

Fresh and chipper after about 15 minutes of sleep, I accompanied Jim and Val to a diner for breakfast. It was silly how attractive the three waitresses at this diner were. It was like Coyote Ugly with grits. After a bit of Christmas shopping, we thanked Jim and went on our way. Somewhere in the Carolinas, Val fell asleep at the wheel, so we pulled over got some coffee and I took over the driver's seat. We had no idea what to expect at this show. Thick Southern accents over the telephone painted less than ideal pictures in our heads, but we where thrilled to meet some exceptionally warm, intelligent and hospitable people, who covered everything in cheese. I ate salad. There must have been some strange salad-apple moonshine chemical reaction that happened in my stomach, because I got sloppy instantly. I think I played poorly, due to not seeing straight, but the double vision made the crowd look twice as big. After we played, we went upstairs and had a little jam session with a bunch of musicians. It was a real good time.

VAL

On the way to this show, Drew and I started talking in southern accents. I have no idea why. We were preparing ourselves for the true South. We didn't know what to expect. This show was being hosted by my friend Andy Gesner's niece Katie and her husband Porter. Entering their house, we found nothing but a warm room full of around 30 people. Tons of homecooked food (most of which Drew couldn't eat cuz it had cheese and he would have shit his lactose-intolerant pants). We were in good hands. I remember their dog Utah, a few cats, a good bunch of CDs on the rack, some weed, and a late-night jam session. The next morning was Sunday and we were greeted by an incredibly tasty breakfast of pancakes & fresh fruit. This is the plus that one finds when playing at married couples houses - food.

DAY 11: SUN DEC 15 – CHARLESTON, NC- BEN AND ABBEY'S COUCH

THE NAVY SEAL OF APPROVAL SHOW

DREW

We got to Charleston quick, or I passed out in the car, because the next thing I know, I'm being attacked by a baby wolf and surrounded by 6-foot seamen. The house belonged to my good friend Ben (who is the sickest bass player I have ever heard) and his new and lovely wife Abbey. We had originally planned to play in Jacksonville on the 15th, but it fell through. Ben and Abbey were gracious enough to invite us to play there for some of Ben's Navy buddies. Abbey even made cookies. (But the dog ate the green ones.) Val and I were nervous about military guys liking the kind of music that we play. As it turned out, it was one of the most attentive and supportive groups of people that we played for. Along the trip, Val and I pretty much consistently anticipated a worse reaction from people than we received. Our preconceived notions of what people would be like were routinely proven incorrect. This was the first show that I played a song that I am calling "The One." It goes like this: *Let this song be the one that sticks in your head while your driving home.* It gets repeated about 900 times and it has an obnoxiously catch melody. As I lay in bed, I could hear Ben and Abbey singing it from their bed. Ha.

VAL

Andrew's friend from Denver ended up giving us a last minute replacement show. Jacksonville fell through. His name was Ben and he was enlisted in the Navy. He was married to a nice girl named Abby. The audience was full of 8 guys and 1 girl, all from the Navy. It was like doing a USO show. I was worried that they were going to hate our depressing, self-possessed crap. But, to my surprise, they loved it. They respected us and were interested in the lyrics of our songs. Melvin, the dog, was a pain in the ass the whole night as he bit at everyone's legs and barked. In the morning, Ben had already left for work but Abby made us eggs and French toast. We had to get a early start cuz our next show was 550 miles away, just outside of Ft. Lauderdale. I made a mistake when planning the show. I thought Plantation was in northern Florida. I couldn't have been more wrong.

DAY 12: MON DEC 16 – PLANTATION, FL- MELISSA'S PARENTS' COUCH

THE LOOK BUT DON'T TOUCH SHOW

DREW

When we were planning the tour route, Val said that Plantation was in the middle of Florida, it isn't. Maybe if you are measuring east to west it could be considered close to the middle, but as far as North/South goes its closer to Cuba than it is to Georgia. On a positive note, the drive was absolutely gorgeous. There was a stretch of Rt. 17 near the South Carolina/Georgia boarder that was unreal. The two-lane highway is lined on both sides by weeping willows with knotty old trunks that surround small, still ponds. Amazing. Once again, Val and I don't know what to expect with this show. All we know is that it was set up by an 18-year-old guy, who had found Val's songs on the Internet. Per usual, we were feeling apprehensive about the show. We called to see if we should pick up beer, but since the girl who lived at this house was only 18, there was no drinking allowed. We decided to stop at a bar close to her house beforehand to ease the awkwardness. The bar we found brewed its own beer so we got the sampler, a tall beer and a shot of whiskey. It was more drinking than we had planned on. Melissa's house is in an upscale, gated community. The security guard gave us directions. Her house was by far the nicest place that we had been. It backed up against a huge man-made lake. They had a pool and a hot tub. They had a TV that came out of the ceiling. Just like Wilmington, everyone was hot. The difference was that here everyone was hot and 17 or 18. Yikes. Thus the tour name for this day. Val and I traded off every few songs. I felt very confident and we both played very well. Our roles were quickly established. I was the comic relief and Val was the heartthrob. After playing, we all talked about ditching everything and going to Key West. I really thought it might happen for a while there, but I guess it was just talk. Instead we watched Robin Williams on their giant TV, while keeping our hormones on a short leash.

VAL

The longest drive. Left at 9am in the morning. Ian is the very cool kid who set up the show for us. Drew called him during our ride to check about the alcohol situation. He said that there would be none because the show was at his friend Melissa's parent's house. So this was going to be our first show on the whole tour without alcohol. It is a sad but true fact that alcohol was needed for this crazy couch thing. You are walking into people's homes and playing on their couches so you need something to take the edge off. I was worried, Drew was irritated. I think he was a little pissed that I booked this show that was at the southern tip of our country and alcohol free. So we stopped at a bar just a few miles away from the show and each had a shot of whiskey and a tall beer. We were badly buzzed and had a tough time finding the house. When we finally arrived, we were shocked by the size of the house and the amount of pretty girls there. Unfortunately they seemed to be a little young, seniors in high school. Eighteen but still. Drew and I are pushing 24. So there were young hot girls everywhere and we were basically drunk. And Melissa's mom and younger brother were in the house. And there was pizza and soda. We played the show. Ian and his friend videotaped it. After the show, we pulled down the movie-screen (yes, movie screen) and watched satellite TV. All in all, Ian was a sweetheart and the audience was very receptive. It was worth the long drive. If for nothing but the warm weather.

DAY 13: TUE DEC 17 – ATHENS, GA- DAVA'S COUCH

THE TOUCHED BY A KITTY SHOW

DREW

This was a long drive. Now that we were headed north again, there was a vague sense of returning to our problems. We turned our car seats into therapy couches. Like the rest of the trip, we spoke endlessly about women, who would ultimately decide to have nothing to do with us, but the subject matter helped us line up miles behind us a little easier. The Athens show was a holiday party. Pretty much everyone at the show was a Grad Student, and they had just finished their finals. The people there were extremely welcoming. I remember telling a lot of stories and drinking. I'm pretty sure Val and I both played well, but to be honest, I really don't remember that part. There was a change of plans after the show and we wound up staying at two young ladies' apartment. *I* slept on the couch. In the morning, we all went out to IHOP. A story was told about a cat that was secretly an angel sent to make her other cat happier. She said it reminded her of Touched by an Angel. Touched by a kitty sounds so dirty. Then Val and I went into Athens and got some of our Christmas shopping done.

VAL

Hit the party in Athens at 8:30pm. The house was full of University of Georgia graduate students. It was a Christmas party and we were the entertainment. The atmosphere was warm and festive.

DAY 14: WED DEC 18 – ASHEVILLE, NC- WOODFIN

THE HARD SHOW

DREW

Woodfin is a crazy place. Basically it's a bunch of punk kids that all live together in a few different houses and trailers. They are tough kids; they live cheaply. Everything is DIY. They compost their shit. They have wood stove heat, and the dog to person ratio is around 3:1. Surprise, surprise, Val and I were pretty apprehensive about this show. We both admitted to feeling that if we could get through this one, then we were set. I had played at Woodfin during my Summer Couch Tour, and I knew that everybody there was a really awesome person, but I still felt intimidated by them. Val played first. At first, applause was a little tough to come by. After a couple songs they started to warm up to him. I was still really nervous during my first two songs and I played pretty terribly. Somewhere in the third song I started to relax. I started to have fun. I was amazed that people knew some of my songs and were asking for certain ones. They asked what different songs were about, so I told a few stories. I actually found myself in tearswhile explaining "Pinkest Places"... that's not very punk rock. During our sets, there was a somewhat insane lady playing hide and seek with no one. She had a screechy voice and was attacked by Shorty, one of the dogs. She was hilarious and you could tell she got a kick out of making the room laugh. By the end of the night we were all drunk. People sang along to "You Were a Song" and any covers Val and I could remember. It wound up being one of my favorite nights on the tour.

VAL

I was not in the mood to play this show. The pattern had been set early. I was the one who was initially negative about every upcoming show and Drew usually was optimistic. Yet, I was almost always happy by the end of them. In this case, we were nearing the end of our trip, heading north again, and I was feeling ready to be home. This show was being held in a trailer home that was part of a development of trailers up in the mountains of North Carolina. Drew informed me that these kids were hardcore vegans and punk rock kids to the core. Let's just say that what we encountered there was the complete anti-thesis of what we experienced in Plantation. These were humble dwellings. Countless dogs roamed throughout the houses. Kids with beards and scruffy clothes. It was intimidating. These kids were really roughing it. I didn't have much confidence when I started playing my first song. I didn't think these kids were going to be kind to my sappy, acoustic crap. I had no choice but to get super drunk. I only played 5 songs and Drew played 7. It was all that was necessary. The clapping after each song was hesitant. But as the night went on, the atmosphere got warmer. We ended up having a huge sing-along to Weezer and Neil Diamond . Turns out they liked good pop songs just as much as we did. In the end, they were just like us. They made a very sweet and kind gesture when they collected a generous donation to help with out road costs. These kids had an appreciation for what it was like to be on tour and on the road. It was an important triumph and a good lesson for Drew and I. I awoke on the couch the next morning and felt proud that we had made it through the toughest audience yet. Lynn, our host, was very appreciative. She said: "Thanks for coming and playing for a bunch of punk kids." She was surprised that we came. And the whole time, I was thinking that they didn't want us there.

DAY 15: THU DEC 19 – CHARLOTTE, NC

THE WONDER WALL SHOW

DREW

Maybe Val and I were in the wrong part, but there is absolutely nothing in Charlotte. It was nothing but chain restaurants and the types of stores that you'd find in airports. Just about the only cool things in Charlotte were our lovely hosts Lisa and Jaime. The plan was to play at a bar called Tyber Creek. This was the same bar I had played my last time in Charlotte. The problem was that some people really suck. One of these aforementioned sucky people was the other guy playing at the bar that night. Apparently, there was some kind of mix up and he didn't know that there was anyone else playing. His set was from 10pm to 2am so there wasn't any room for other performers on the bill. Are you kidding me? A four hour set. So while the customers of the Tyber Creek had 4 hours of bad Oasis covers inflicted upon them, Val and I went back to Lisa and Jaime's and played for them. It wound up being a great time. The whole idea of the Couch Tour is to play intimate shows; we passed the guitar around and just enjoyed ourselves.

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VAL

We were scheduled to play at a college bar type venue in Charlotte. It was set up by Drew's friend and ex-bandmate Lisa. When we got there the guys that were also scheduled to play that night said that there would be no room for us on the bill that night because their set would run from 10pm to 1am. Something ridiculous like that. I realized at that moment that I would rather take out my dick and urinate on this kid's head then share a bill with him. The selfish little brat. They couldn't shorten their 3 hour set? Oh, and their first song was "Wonder Wall" by Oasis. Yes, that's right folks, they opened with a cover. I despised them. I told Drew that we had no right playing a show with such cunning individuals. Anyone who opens up with Oasis for their 3 hour set is way too brave for us. So we had a few drinks and went back to Lisa and her roommate's apartment. We ended up trying to score Ecstacy but it never worked. Instead, Drew and I played some songs for Lisa and Jaime on their couch. By the end of the night Drew and I were asking for advice about love. It was truly pathetic. But the girls were very sweet, staying up and instructing us on romance. The last thing I remember about the night is falling over this little table on which the phone was placed and watching the entire table completely collapse underneath me.

DAY 16: FRI DEC 20 -- ASHBURN, VA

THE OLD FOLKS CAN PARTY TOO SHOW

DREW

In Ashburn, we played for an older and younger crowd. I'm pretty sure that Val and I were the only one's between 13 and 35. The younger kids were supposed to stay downstairs, but they frequently came through the room. We'd have to quickly alter a few lyrics to make it a PG show. During "Shock", Val with eyes closed, not realizing that a couple 9 year olds had come into the room, dropped a few F-bombs on them. I tried to wave him off, but to no avail. It took me a while to get comfortable at this show, but during the break between sets I got to know everyone and I felt much more at home. They really seemed to like the confessional nature of the songs. Afterwards we went down to their basement with all the kids. It was a lot of fun. We played air hockey and pool and listened to Avail Laving.

VAL

Okay, we played to the young-ins in Plantation and now we were playing the old ones. Thirty, forty and fifty year olds. Again, on the way to the show I was telling Drew that this was going to be horrendous. It was a Christmas dinner party complete with married couples and their kids. Expensive food everywhere. And again, I was completely wrong. The show was excellent. The adults were very receptive to the serious lyrics and were really surprised that we were the actual authors of the songs that we were playing. Oh, and the 13 and 14 year old girls that were there wanted our autographs. Yes, Drew and I had become celebs. It was truly sad at the end of the night when the both of us found ourselves flirting with these young girls and their hot mother. Truly sad. I remember the both of us looking at each other and giggling uncontrollably. "So, do you girls like Puddle of Mudd?" "YEAH!" cried the girls and their single mother in unison.

DAY 17: SAT DEC 21 – JERSEY, NJ – UNCLE JOE'S

THE HAPPY AND SAD TO BE HOME SHOW

DREW

Uncle Joe's is always fun place to play. It was cool to see a lot of familiar faces. Andy Camp played before us and was really excellent. I played first, then Val, and then we did a couple songs together. When we were finished, I was overwhelmed by the relief/depression that comes after a big event. The feeling I had in Florida of returning to real life became very acute. I was looking forward to sleeping in my own bed, but the whole night felt bittersweet. However, I did realize I had gotten a really close friend out of the whole experience. I honestly can't think of anyone I know, who I would have been able to get along with for that amount of time, in that proximity, as well as I did with Val.

VAL

Home. Sweet sweet smelly Jersey City. Well, that's not where Drew and I live but it's close enough. Uncle Joe's was the venue. A quaint little bar in the ghetto. It's called the "Best NYC club outside of NYC." It was great to see friends at the show. The question on everybody's mind: "So how was it?" My answer: "It was amazing and Drew and I hate each other." No, the truth is that after this tour I am one of Drew Isleib's biggest fans. A fan of his music and a fan of him as a person. Most of the shit we discussed and a lot of the things that we experienced couldn't be included in this diary. Either because I don't feel comfortable telling the public or it's just too hard to explain. You had to be there. We took a chance on each other and lucked out. Two strangers on the open road. We must do this again.

For the further adventures of Val and Drew, visit www.valemmich.com and http://ernestjenning.com/bands_drew.asp

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All Night (Tee Pee) These southern boys by way of Greensboro, NC play classic rock the way it was meant to be played, with grit, balls, and plenty of soul. Hardly a stoner rock rip-off All Night infuse their love of bands such as Humble Pie and The James Gang with their own solid song writing skills. So instead of coming off like the billionth Sabbath clone these guys sound like a long lost early 70's rock outfit who would have been right at home rockin' the Fillmore East.

Arrogance - *The 5'11" Record* (Gaff Music) Before Don Dixon became known for producing albums for collage rock sensations REM and Let's Active in the early 80's he along with four other guys from North Carolina made ultra tuneful melodic pop rock under the name of Arrogance. This is my first introduction to the group and I'm sorry I haven't heard them sooner. They successfully and seemly blended soulful 70's pop with jangly 60's rock and quirky new wave into their own unique sound. This is one of those discs that will have you hunting down the rest of group's catalog.

Audioslave (Epic) Stranger things have happened in the world of r nr I suppose but I never would have matched up Chris Cornell and the remaining Rage Against The Machine guys. Very commercial sounding hard rock but at times definitely captures a rawness, hits a groove, and allows Cornell to unleash the power of his pipes once again. It's just after a few cuts I've had enough. I'd much prefer to rock out to *Ultramega OK* to get my Chris Cornell swerve on.

Boston - *Corporate America* (Artemis) Boston founder Tom Schultz and singer Brad Delp are back with four new members. A few tunes on this disc are almost just as catchy as anything the band has done in the past and a few moments even recall the group's hard rockin' 70's riffs. Even though at times it's a little on the lite side there are enough good hooks and melodies to make for repeated listens.

Dead Meadow - *Got Live If You Want It* (Bomp!) The DC psych trio groove and wail full on with their sonic Hobbit rock for a crowd at Maxwells back in February 02'. Almost feels like you're there... sorta.

Deadsy - *Commencement* (Dreamworks) As much as I was ready to dismiss these guys as another heinous nu-metal group I couldn't help but be sucked into their Gary Numan sinister synth attack on "Key to Gramercy Park" even if Elijah Blue Allman does sounds like the singer from Men w/ Out Hats. The melodic "Brand New Love", and the metalized Duran Duran of "She Likes Big Words" equally sink their hooks in you. They're cover of Rush's "Tom Sawyer" ain't bad either. I bet ol' Uncle Dwayne is rolling in his grave.

Demons - *Stockholm Slump* (gearheadrecords.com) Scandinavian greasers belting out some sweaty punk n roll ala Supersuckers/Gluifer with the ol' devil-may-care attitude and rockabilly flair. If Fonzi rock is your thing these guys do it as well as anybody I suppose.

Walter Egan - *Apocalypso Now* (gaffmusic.com) The man who wrote one of the most soulful and memorable tunes of the late 70's "Magnet & Steel" is back with his eighth release *Apocalypso Now*. The se 14 tracks may not ooze hot summer nights like his first two classic LPs, but *Apocalypso Now* certainly does have it's share of shining moments. Opening track "Far and Away" reminds you of why you dug Walter so much in the first place with his instantly recognizable smooth soulful vocals and laid-back delivery. While "Only Love is Left Alive" harkens back to his classic 70's days with it's Fleetwood Mac-Byrds guitar work. He even pulls off a great cover of the Roky Ericson classic "You're Gonna Miss Me". After listening to *Apocalypso Now* it's obvious Mr. Egan still hasn't lost his gift for writing timeless melodic rock tunes.

Eels - *Souljacker* (Dreamworks) I can honestly say this band annoyed the hell me back in 96' with their alterna-pop hit "Novocain for the Soul". They sounded to me like listened to a little *too* much Beck. *Souljacker* is my first real taste of The Eels left-of-center pop . Vocalist/band leader E's vocals still remind me a lot of Beck's circa *Mellow Gold*, while the tunes sound more like Jeff Linkous from Sparklehorse jamming with Cake. The disc's 12 songs are about half and half. Half have that super creative spark and great quirky lyrics intact, the other half forgettable. And as far as image goes in he's got a great Ted Kaczynski thing going on with shades, beard, and hoody.

WOWIE ZOWIE

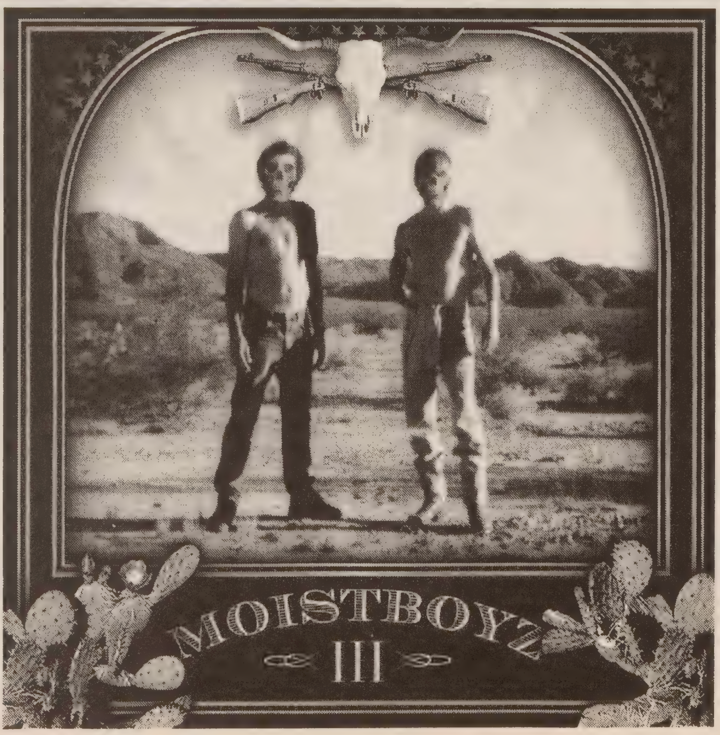
meditations on pop music by rick howie kufner

Beck - *Sea Change* (Geffen) A mellower sad boy Beck is on Sea Change and sounds a bit more country too. If your expecting a *Midnight Vultures* or Odelay look elsewhere this one is designed strictly for sad cowpokes.

Black Crowes - *Black Crowes Live* (V2) Their final offering to the fans as they've now have called it day. The 2-dsic set was compiled by Crowes guitarist Rich Robinson and is taken from the band's 2001 farewell tour. The 2disc set includes a nice selection from the group's catalog and while it isn't as exciting as their live album with Jimmy Page it still rocks good and hard in classic Crowes fashion.

The Brooklyn Cowboys - *Dodging Bullets* (Leaps Records) This all-star country rock group features singer songwriter Walter Egan ("Magnet & Steel") on vocals and guitar, Buddy Cage (Dylan, New Riders of the Purple Sage) on steel guitar, Jeff "Stick" Davis (The Amazing Rhythm Aces) on bass. The Cowboys do a great job in resurrecting the sound and spirit of Gram Parsons and The Flying Burrito Brothers with their rootsy Americana rockin' twang. For those of you who are already fans of classic country rock or into the whole No Depression scene you need to pick this gem of an album up.

Bobby Conn - *Winners EP* (Thrill Jockey) Strictly for serious fans as this five song EP includes four different remixes of the song "Winners" off Bobby's last record *The Golden Age*. I myself dig the man's work very much and considering he isn't the most prolific artist what ever he dishes out I'll buy.



Fischerspooner - #1 (Ministry of Sound) Sigue Sigue Sputnik meets The Human League from Williamsburg, Brooklyn. Leading the pack in electro with their tongue-in-cheek dance troop live show and surprisingly well-composed neo new wave numbers. Heard they got signed for a pile of cash, should be interesting to see what happens with these art school jokers.

Flaming Sideburns - *Save Rock N Roll* (Jetset) These Finnish rockers serve up a flame broiled whopper of Stones swagger and 60's *Nuggets* injected garage rock. Not terribly original but a solid effort just the same.

Gabin (Astralwerks) Euro style trip-hop jazz that you'd expect to hear in some cozy little café in the village. Not the most exciting stuff in the world but it does function well as background music while your sippin' on your latte.

The Gee Strings - *Arrest Me* (Dead Beat) Sleazy late 70's style LA punk with catchy buzz-saw guitars, a Euro chick singer named Ingi, and song titles like "Snuff Fiction" and "Royal Flesh" simply make for a good time whether you're a perv or not.

Gov't Mule - *The Deep end Vol. 2* (ATO) Vol. 2 is the second tribute collection for deceased Gov't Mule bassist Allan Woody. The all-star project this time around includes the likes of Les Claypool, Phil Lesh, Jack Casady, Jason Newsted, and Yes' Chris Squire just to name a few. Hyanes and Abts also get a little help from Bernie Worrell, David Grisman, John Medeski and Mr. Metallica himself James Hetfield, who lends his signature gruff vocals on the rockin' "Drivin' Rain". If you're a sucker for good blues-rock then you should without pick this collection up pronto.

Grief - *Turbulent Times* (Southern Lord) Grief was one of the leaders in the sludge-metal scene for the past decade unbeknownst to my ignorant ass. Guess I missed the boat. A quote taken from the liner notes "Every chord is like a nuclear explosion of depression". Not the best record to throw on after you've been dumped by your girl friend.

Har Mar Superstar - *You Can Feel Me* (WB) This indie-rock-cum-MTV R&B joker looks like Ron Jeremy and sounds like R. Kelly. The tune s "Power Lunch" and "Freedom Summer" (killer Meters sample) are a good time fer sure. I appreciate his love of Stevie Wonder and Barry White but the bubble gum R& B wears thin *real* quick. He should go in the 70's soul direction of "Freedom Summer" next time out and who knows since he's already got friends in high places he may end up pleasing trendy folks and real music lovers at the same time.

The Hellacopters - *By The Grace of God* (Universal) Pure and simple this is the shit. The Copter's have really done it this time and made the perfect rock album. If they were too garage for you pop lovers before then you'll love this and for those die-hard fans out there they still have the power to kick your ass with their stadium sized hooks and smokin' riffs. Forgot all the other Swedish bands being touted as the next big thing these guys are it and have been it for a while.

The Hot Six (breakerbreaker@hotmail) Orlando, Florida indie punk that sounds a bit like later period Man or Astroman with some tweaked out Braniac keyboard madness thrown in. If you can't get enough of the current wave of post punk then you may wanna give these fellers a try.

Luna - (Jetset) As dependable as they ever were Luna offer up six originals of their easy listening shoegazer pop as well as taking a stab at the Stones' classic "Waiting on A Friend". If you're a fan you probably already have this if you're not it's as good as any place to start.

Jesse Malin - *The Fine Art of Self Destruction* (Artemis) Former lead singer of New Yawk's favorite 90's lower east side glam punks Dgeneration offers up 11 tracks of punky roots rock in the vein of later day Replacements. On *Fine Art* Malin not only shows he's a fine tunesmith but unlike Mr. Westerberg's initial solo efforts he manages to retain his edge.

J. Mascis & The Fog - *Free So Free* (Artemis) J. is on a roll, it's that simple. If you dug the last record then you'll dig this fer sure.

The Steven McDonald Group - *This Is Not A Rebellion, This Is A Mass Awakening* (Five Foot Two Records) Ex Redd Kross front man Steven McDonald along with his new offer five tasty pop nuggets on this EP. Styles range from the Beatles-Beach Boys flavored " Something to Love" to the super infectious Brit pop punk of "Motorboat". Now I'm ready for the main course.

Moistboyz - *Moistboyz III* (Ipecac) Never heard the EP or the debut but this here disc has certainly peaked my interest. Dusty, dirty, "fuck you" convict rock. Think classic ZZ Top meets punk-metal insanity and energy of a couple of meth-heads who've been up all week. Oh yeah, the guitarist is Mickey from Ween.

Fischerspooner

Mount Sims - *Ultra Sex* (Emperor Norton) Next to Fischerspooner Mount Sims has got my vote for the most exciting eclectro out there these days. Think Depeche Mode meets the sleazy edge and groove of early Prince. Like Fischerspooner, Mount Sims AKA Matt Sims' tongue is firmly planted In his cheek. *Ultra Sex* is ideal for all you're hedonistic weekend endeavors.

Tom Petty and The Heartbreakers - *The Last DJ* (WB) On TP's latest he tackles and shows his strong distaste with the decline in talent and increase in mediocrity and artistic integrity in today's get-rich-quick music business. He's frustrated, pissed, and at times sounds generally bummed out. The quality of the song writing is certainly up to par with any of his past releases. The mood of the album given its subject matter isn't the most upbeat and at times can get a little gloomy. The brightest moment on the disc and my favorite is the ragtime "The Man Who Loved Woman" with Fleetwood Mac's Lindsey Buckingham adding his Beach Boyish background vocals. *The Last DJ*, although clearly not the man's best record is still a must for any serious Petty fan.

The Pretenders - *Loose Screw* (Artemis) Chrissie tries her hand at creating a reggae-pop album and succeeds in doing so and ends coming up with what could be her best record in a long time. *Loose Screw* is more even than uneven and shows a return to great song writing on Chrissie's part.

Railroad Earth - *Bird in a House* (Sugar Hill) These New Jersey ex-From Good Homes members play blue grass tinged roots rock that recalls at times the Dead but also retains their own Celtic influences with an earthy quality that doesn't repel one like many a jam band does. They're authenticity and earnestness shines brightly on *Bird in a House*.

Chris Robinson - *New Earth Mud* (Redline Entertainment) Now that the Crowes have called it quits, Chris has embarked on a new solo career and the fruit of those recordings is *New Earth Mud*. The 12tracks on this disc don't stray to far from the nest, (no pun intended) but instead of coming full steam at you like most of the Crowes sweaty bluesy rock tended to do, Robinson works from a larger palette of sounds and goes for a more stripped down singer songwriter feel that will please both fan's of the Crowes as well Neil Young and other soulful songwriter types.

Rondellus - *Sabatum* (Music Cartel) Here's an interesting concept, one that I'm sure all Goths and Magic card playing geeks will fancy while they're enjoying a thick foamy grog while playing against like-minded Druid dorks. An instrumental band that belts out early 14th century style (i.e. mandolins-lutes etc.) covers of Sabbath tunes. Talk about old school.

Sheavy - *Synchronized* (Music Cartel) Sheavy sounds way too much like another band called Black Shabbath.

The Sights - *Got What We Want* (www.fallofrome.com) This trio plays fuzzy 60's garage rock and jangle pop that fans of *Nuggets* comps will be sure to dig. Nothing exceptional or new just well executed pop songs.

Simian - *We Are Your Friends* (Astralwerks) English lads who's sound lies somewhere between the quirky pop and overtly Britishness of Blur and the beat heavy experimental electronic bounce of the Beta Band. The little tweaks and effects that pop in and out of these tunes are enjoyable enough and add a cool flavor to what would other wise be plain old Brit-pop.

The Snakes (Bomp!) Imagine the Byrds with dark and seedy slithering undertones and VU's dirty drug vibe. That LA's Snakes, my pick for one of the best new records this year and one of the best bands to emerge from LA since The Beachwood Sparks.

SpaceBoy - *Searching The Stone Library For The Green Page of Illusion* (Southern Lord) Now this is my kinda noise! Pounding melodic inter-galactic prog metal with its blaring and buzzing amplifiers, urgent time changes, and guitar geek chops to pull it off (think Fucking Champs). If you ever dug Hawkwind, speed metal, or Dr. Who you'll love this shit.

Sourvein - *Will To Mangle* (Southern Lord) This North Carolina foursome excretes toxic metal-sludge in a good ol' Buzz-Oven and EyeHateGod good time fashion. Com' on ya know that there's nothing better than throwin' on a little sludge rock when you feel like celebrating life's precious moments. And these negative creeps are that special band seething with just the right bad vibes.

The Washdown (Lookout!) This Tampa quintet plays a mix of 60's garage rock and arty post punk. The music itself ain't bad, but I fucking hate these kind of vocals. High pitched nasally whiny art- fag crap. I mean I used to like the Fall but with all these bands today discovering the atonal yelp of Mark E. Smith its launched a million clones that I don't have the stomach for. I'm sure a ton of indie geeks will love this but if I want rockin' late 60's fair I'll throw me on some MC5 and if I want me some art punk I'll throw on some PIL .instead of lunging for the skip button.

The Soundtrack of Our Lives - *Behind The Music* (Universal) Some bands never move past their influences. They simply ape the style and atheistic off their favorite records. This is a band who does not. Although this Swedish group's influences are recognizable at times TSOOL are their own entity. Like their countrymen The Hellacopters they are possessed by the spirit of rock n roll and transcend any retro gimmick. And "Sister Surround" is probably one of the best rock songs these ears have heard in quite a while.

Sugarcult - *Start Static* (Artemis) These Santa Barbara pop punkers remind me a bit of those one-hit wonders Lit from a couple o' years back only better.

Tahiti 80 - *Wallpaper For The Soul* (Minty Fresh) Light breezy pop from France that has a lot in common with fellow frogs Phoenix in that they rework 80's Top 40 into something quite enjoyable. *Wallpaper For The Soul* is a perfect disc of upbeat pop gems ideal for groovin' to with the top down.

Dar Williams - *The Beauty of the Rain* (Razor & Tie) Folk singer Dar Williams wears her heart on her sleeve and sings like she means it. Musically she occupies a mellow folky pop sound akin to 10,000 Maniacs and at times The Gin Blossoms. On Dar's fifth studio album *The Beauty of the Rain* her soft inviting vocals and good sense of melody are enough to keep you captivated for the duration of the disc.

The Witches - *On Parade* (www.fallofrome.com) This Detroit garage rock group is one of the best neo-psych garage bands out there today. The combination of singer Troy Gregory's deadpan cool vocal delivery , the groups' distinctive hooks, and pulsing rhythms sounds like The Velvet Underground from Motor City. The production on the album is stellar and takes these songs to a whole other level.

Zodiac Mindwarp And The Love Reaction - *I Am Rock* (Cosmosodomistic.com) Zodiac Mindwarp. The 80's gimmicky biker rock dudes are back with their follow to 87's *Tattooed Beat Messiah, I Am Rock.* They've still got the dumb sexist shock lyrics intact and their AC/DC and Cult riff rock style intact as well as showing a more melodic side on the tune "Jane in Blue" which sounds like Iggy singing Bowie's "Heros". All in all if you don't mind the sick fuck lyrics you'll have a good time with this one.

Anthologies/Comps

Almost You: The Songs of Elvis Costello (Glurp/Bar None) I guess it's about that time that Elvis C. gets a tribute disc. This 14 song collection covers songs from Elvis' early period and all except a few of the artists execute them in a Alt-country fashion. Quite enjoyable, makes you wanna listen to the real thing.

BaadAsssss Cinema- ***The Sounds of Blaxploitation*** (TVT) For those of you who don't have much in the way of good funk or soul in your collection this comp is a nice thing to have. Includes tracks from Earth Wind & Fire, B.T. Express, War, Gil Scott-Heron, Roy Ayers,, The Blackbyrds, Lonnie Liston Smith, Graham Central Station, Edwin Starr, James Brown, Issac Hayes, and Curtis Mayfield. Thirteen tracks of pure black magic that is perfect for those times when you wish there was more in urban in your suburban.

BadOrb.com - *Bless You* (Shanachie) This comp is essentially a remix disc of Orb songs by Orb man Alex Paterson. Much like an Orb record the tracks are weird ambient spacy and moody. The eleven artists compiled on this collection take their shot at an Orb covers. If anything its an ideal disc for late night headphone listening sessions.

The Soundtrack Of Our Lives

CQ Soundtrack (Emperor Norton) An artsy retro French spy looking flick from director Roman Coppela which I have yet to see. It looks like it's a little bit Danger Diabolic and a little Modesty Blaise maybe. The music composed for the film was done by the French group Mellow who mix things up from groovy 60's Shindig intros, to French pop, to 70's Match Game funky intros as well. Overall it's fun and works nice as background music.

Grand Theft Auto - The Soundtracks (Epic) A genius idea if you ask me. Seven different radio stations set in each vehicle with seven different DJ personalities set to the day-glow 80's world of Miami Vice. DJ personalities include: DJ Lazlow-Heavy Metal, Adam First-New Wave, -DJ Fernando-Top 40 romantic sap, DJ Mr. Magic-early hip-hop and electro, Oliver "Lady Killer" Biscuit-soul and funk, DJ Pepe-Latin pop/rock, and DJ Toni who plays cheesy FM radio classics. Each soundtrack includes a couple of fake commercials that are worth a chuckle and the DJ's are funny in a self-deprecating way.

Martin Mull - *Mulling It Over* (Razor & Tie) For those of you who know who the man is you need no intro but for those of you who don't or know him from the Roseanne TV show unfortunately for you you've missed a true original. Mull was the inspiration for WKRP's Johnny Fever, the blue-print for a young Steve Martin, and an inspiration to musical nuts like They Might Be Giants and Mr. Jim Testa. Not only is the man clever as hell with his narcissistic wise-assed wry sense of humor but on top of all that he was a great musician able to jump from country to rock to jazz with ease. This comp came out a couple years ago but I finally got my mitts on it. Although I have most of his vinyl, it's sure nice to have all these side-splitting memorable tunes on one shiny little disc.

The September Sessions Soundtrack (Universal) The surfing world's answer to Dave Mattews is pro surfer/film maker Jack Johnston. Johnston plays acoustic tunes flavored with a laid-back sand- between your toes Jimmy Buffet sensibility. Jack's got two cuts on the disc including his rendition of Buffet's "A Pirate Looks At 40" as well as two more cuts with him and the September Sessions Band. The disc also includes tracks by Ozomatli, Grayboy & Karl Denson, G. Love & Special Sauce and a few others.

Song in The Key of Z -Vol:1 (Gammon) A bizarre collection of musical outsiders including: Cap'n Beefheart, The Shaggs, Daniel Johnston, Tiny Tim, and Welsy Willis to name a few. If you're in the mood to hear truly eccentric fringe music this comp is a treasure chest of weirdness and highly recommended.

REISSUES

Elvin Bishop - *The Elvin Bishop Group* (Sundazed) The debut album from ex-Paul Butterfield Blues band guitarist, Elvin gave blues-rock fans a taste of what was to come: super funky soul and blues injected rock and boogie that's drippin' hot and juicy like a pippin' hot bucket o' greazy fried chicken. Just listen to tracks like "How Much More" and "Dad Gum Ya Hide, Boy" and " Honey Bee", and you'll know I ain't talkin' jive. Fans of contemporary blues- rockers Delta 72 should pick this up and check out one of the original funky white brothas. The disc also includes 2 live bonus tracks.

Elvin Bishop - *Feel It!* (Sundazed) Elvin and co's second LP show him continuing and refining his funky blues with groovin' electric energy that can be heard in his soulful leads and the band as a whole is in fine form. Damn, wish I could've been in the crowd.

Grand Funk Railroad - *E Pluribus Funk* (Capitol) This 1971 release by Flint Michigan's finest shows the trio getting harder and funkier than before. With tracks like booty shakin' "Foot Stompin' Music" and the politically conscious and super funky riffs of "People, Let's Stop The War" . Overall *E Pluribus Funk* is one of the group's stronger releases and is worth picking up if you don't already own this on vinyl or if you're new to the band's catalog.

Grand Funk Railroad *Survival* (Capitol) Although a bit more slicked-out than earlier Grand Funk releases *Survival* is a solid effort none the less complete with a great cover of the Stone's "Gimme Shelter".

Redd Kross - *Neurotica* (Five Foot Two Records) This was my first taste of Redd Kross's high energy brand of 70's power pop punk kitsch back in high school that I eagerly ate up like a stoner goes threw a bag of BBQ potato chips at 3 o'clock in the mourning. For those of you younger music lovers who haven't had a chance to check out the Kross these guys were retro when retro wasn't cool and on top of it they had amazingly catchy songs. Now is your chance to get your hands on this long out of print late 80's classic.

DVDS

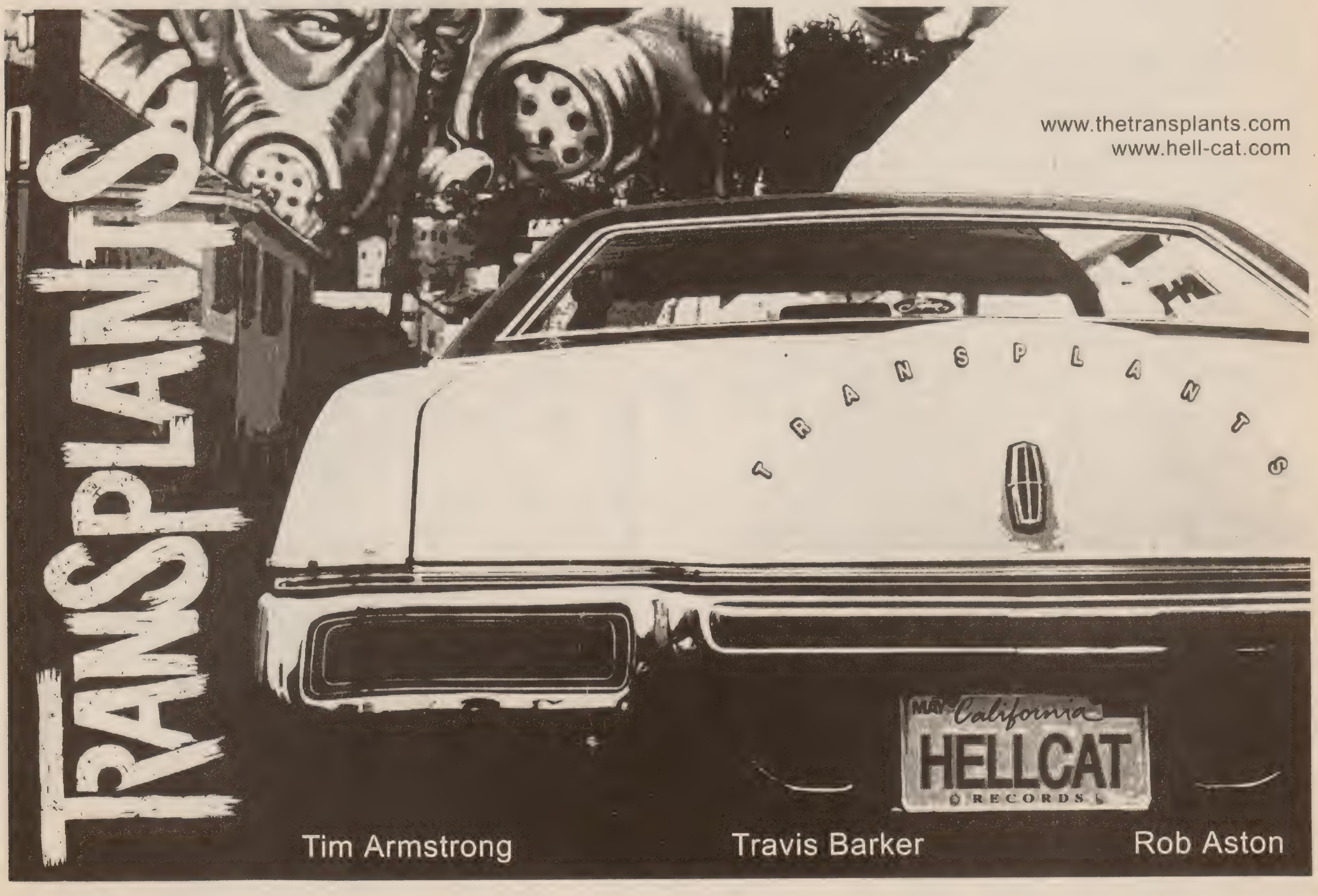
Black Sabbath Vol:1 (Sanctuary) For those of you hardcore Sabbath fans who haven't gotten completely ill yet from watching the king of doom metal become acceptable as Martha Stewart here is a killer DVD of the story of Sabbath-the Ozzy years. Spanning from their early days as a blues rock band to the end of the line w/ the Oz man. Cool live footage and rare videos including the song " " from Technical Ecstasy featuring drummer Bill Ward on vocals. It also includes interviews w/ Tony, Geezer, and Bill.

Black Sabbath Vol :2 (Sanctuary) If you still loved Sabbath after Ozzy got the boot and the evil Elf himself Mr. Ronnie James Dio stepped in then this DVD will just as equally captivate you although the footage and interviews pale in comparison to Vol:1.

Blue Oyster Cult

Blue Oyster Cult-Live (Sanctuary) Gone are the smoke machines, the expensive sci-fi laser show, and Buck's mustache. Also gone is the band's well - crafted mysterious image they cultivated throughout their heyday from 72-81. The group's current lineup sounds great and is tighter than a knat's ass and unlike other bands of the classic rock era who simply milk it merely playing their old hits the Cult still are cranking out fresh new tunes. So while "Live " isn't exactly the most exciting live spectacle it's still a treat for die-hard BOC fans. For those of you who like myself who weren't there back in the group's hey day do yourself a favor pick up the out-of-print DVD or VHS "LIVE 1976' with the entire original line up and the killer laser show. Then just fire up a doobie and you're like so there man.

Melvins (musicvideodistributors.com) I saw these original grunge monsters once open for Nirvana at the Ritz back in 92' and they destroyed as you would expect. This sweaty live show in typical Melvins fashion is loud noisy and cathartic but unless you are actually there in front of the stage banging your head along with Dale's thunderous drumming or King Buzzo's heavy-than-shit chugging riffage it gets a little dull after a few songs. I guess ya had to be there. Recommended for serious fans only.

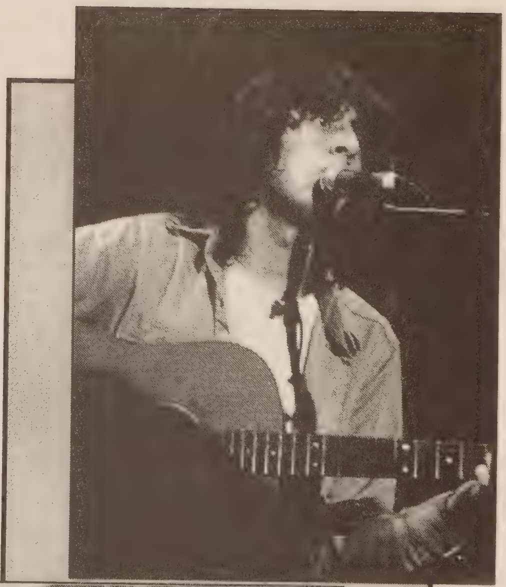


review:
Moldy no more

ADAM GREEN – *Garfield* (Rough Trade/Sanctuary)
KIMYA DAWSON · *I'm Sorry That Sometimes I'm Mean* (Rough Trade/Sanctuary)

If your favorite part of the Moldy Peaches was their use of four-letter words (tossed in amidst four-track tape hiss and studied ironic whimsy) - or if you're still a 13-year old boy and actually think MTV's "Jackass" is funny – then you'll probably get a chuckle from *Garfield.* Ex-Peach Adam Green isn't dressing up like Robin Hood (or was that supposed to be Peter Pan?) anymore, but he's still singing in a deadpan monotone (he sounds like a lobotomized Ira Kaplan) and writing three-chord ditties that rely on bathroom humor for the punchlines. The simple, four-tracked tunes on this disc, mostly recorded with acoustic guitar and usually one other instrument (like clarinet, jew's harp, or synth,) sound as old-timey as a Leon Redbone LP; but Green keeps a contemporary feel (I guess that's the anti-folk part) by punctuating his lyrics with modern-day references like backpacks and computer shows (or in the case of the grossest song here, a coed circle jerk.) *Garfield's* last three songs – recorded with a full band in a real studio – offer a taste of what Green's next album might sound like, a fuller (and thankfully, less aggressively stoopid) pop sound that casts Green as an anti-folk waif adrift in the big city, like a latterday Jonathan Richman. That record, when it's finished, might actually be worth owning. As for this one, well, it's too bad the Queers already used the title *Love Songs For The Retarded;* it would've been perfect.

It's certainly consistent with this fucked-up universe of ours that Green's former Moldy Peaches partner Kimya Dawson works with children at a day-care center to earn a living, which keeps her musical career on standby and her touring schedule largely tethered to the anti-folk scene on the Lower East Side. Meanwhile, potty-mouthed prettyboy Green has rich parents who pay his rent, so he's off touring across the country with his buddies like Ben Kweller and the Strokes. That being said, Dawson's solo debut (if you don't count the demo CDR's she's been releasing in limited quantities for years) really isn't that much better than Green's. It's more mature and less offensive, for sure; in fact, her strummed folkie lullabies would make a perfect children's album, if not for the occasional dirty word (old habits die hard, I guess.) Dawson sings in a hushed whisper and strums along with her acoustic guitar; the songs are playfully girlish and winsome. But nothing here jumps out at you like "Who's Got The Crack?" or "New York City's Like A Graveyard" or even the Ween-ish "Downloading Porn With Dave." The Moldy Peaches were, it seems, quite a bit more than the sum of their parts. As solo artists, to borrow a line from Robert Christgau, Adam Green makes you go yuck, while Kimya Dawson isn't good for much more than a yawn. – Jim Testa



Adam Green photo courtesy of Laura Young, www.modernage.org

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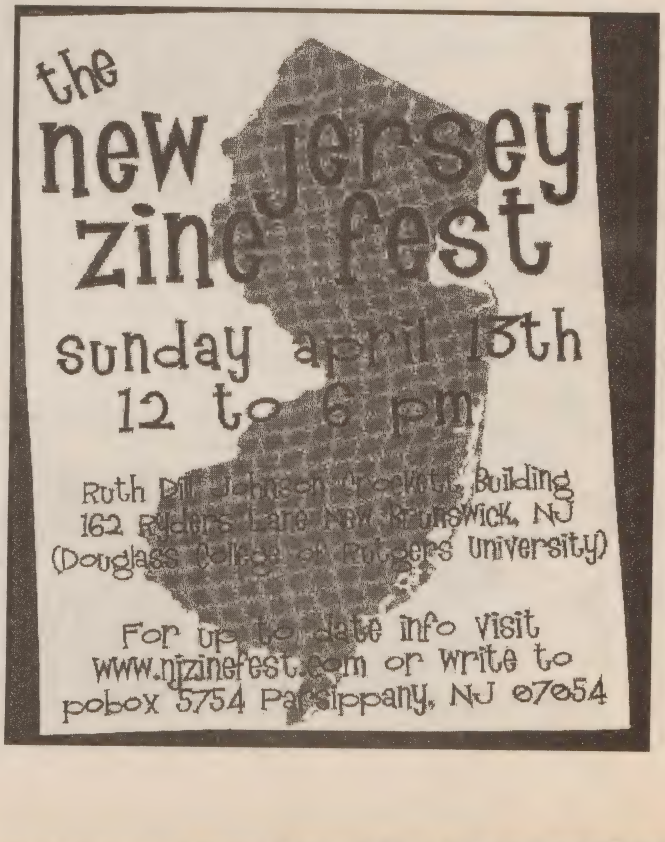

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the world according to wawyrzniak

by joe wawyrzniak

DOUGLAS KINGS - *Three Bucks* (Evil Owl Records, 10344 Mississippi Blvd. Coon Rapids MN *55433)* Five songs worth of raw, sludgy, dirtier-than-long-greasy-unwashed-hair punky rumbling growl and snarl their way into your spiky black heart on this mean'n'lean CD EP. The angry, raspy vocals certainly hit the spot; the sinewy drums and grungy strangulated spew-spittin' guitars are likewise on the money. From the super-smokin' ode to almighty Hong Kong action-movie star Chow Yun Fat to the hilariously rude sonic raspberiy delivered in the extremely funny ditty "Pinky Ring," this eminently groovy little beat offers plenty of tough, tasty gristle for aficionados of good, gritty, gut-rippin' punk rock to gnaw on.

LIFE IN A BLENDER - *Tell Me I'm Pretty* (Fang Records PU Box *652* New York, NY 1 The funky, syncopated slow drag rhythmic push'n'pull momentum of the opening song "Something Must Break" firmly sets the tone for the fabulously freaked-out sonic eccentricity to come. If all-out madly careening and unpredictable aural weirdness and totally deranged musical abandon is your bag (and it's certainly mine), then this divinely dementoid album is the perfect psycho platter to lose your mind to. Whether it's the precisely detailed description of a hapless working stiff's unsparingly grim daily routine in the outstanding "Mobile Wash .Unit," the gleefully ghoulish gallows humor of the outrageously sick "Dead Get Down," the deliciously kinky carnal fetish tableaux of the especially saucy "Sex With Cops," or the striking bleakness of the supremely bummed-out closing cut "Party Soon," this terrifically wacked'n'cracked honey delivers one marvelously off-beat track after another. Better yet, the froggy croaked vocal hoot and the feverishly cranked, wonky, and eclectic music completely cooks as well, with biting guitars, gutty jack-hammer drums, weepy violins, and soulful rumbling keyboards creating a delectably deep and layered sound that's thick, harmonic, and remarkably resonant.

NEW JERSEY UNSIGNED BANDS VOL. 1 (Central Sound Recording Studios, 92 Brunswick Ave, Spotswood, NJ 08884) Opening on a stirring note with the smooth-rockin' urgem vibrancy of Rich Lancia's galvanizing "Touch," hitting a cool, funky stride with Smokin' Catfish's supremely mellow blues number "Stleef Song" and Dirty Pool's lively get-down boogie woogie workout "Mister Livingood," striking a beautifully touching and delicate chord with Jack Stock's extremely moving "Cowboy," punkin' it up delightfully with Shrinking Violet's enjoyably thrashy "Princess," and reaching a thrilling peak with Paula Riscoe's s throaty "Forget About Her," this 10 song various artists compilation covers all the necessary bases to rate as a very solid and satisfying listen. Covering a nifty range of genres — peppy rock, lowdown scroungy blues, forlorn country, and so on -- with only an occasional clunker amongst its mostly up-to-snuff tracks (Avalanche's "Don't Blame It on Me" in particular pretty tepid), this pleasingly eclectic odds and ends collection overall does the trick quite nicely.

THE ROSEMARY PURE - *Tin* (rosemarypure.com) Oh yeah, this is exactly how I like my pop-rock music to be: Gutsy, punchy, and melodic, with a furiously tough, rippin', but still graceful and dulcet sound, strong, full-throated, exquisitely soaring vocals, tight'n'tuneful arrangements, gorgeous backing harmonies, and a sturdy, resilient, down-to-earth sensibility with a fabulously astute, clear-eyed, fiercely unsentimental perspective on everyday trials and tribulations. Intricate melodies swell and grow with bracing vigor and urgency, the emotions are raw, touchingly open, and superbly anguished, and the incredibly soulful singing goes straight to the heart with genuinely stirring directness. All in all, this baby qualifies as a total pip.

HEADMESS - *Puzzles* (Indiego Music Center 3650 Osage Street Denver, CO 80211) Hey, what do you get when you blend pleasingly subdued hip-hop with so sensationally soulful it's downright heavenly R & B, beautifully sung by either a smooth baritone or a great gruff growl, spruce it up with a gorgeously delicate female background chorus, keep the tempos slow & casual, maintain a steady series of rock-solid beats, add a dash of deep bass and cutting guitars, and top it all off with splendidly saucy lyrics, then clinch the whole happening deal by setting the deliciously funky aural mellowness to a marvelously rich, thick and tasty good word groove? Why, you get one helluva a terrific 6 song CD EP, that's what, baby!

NUTS IN YOUR MOUTH - *Guaranteed to Like It If You Got A Ass* (NYM Enterprises, PO Box 250-652, New York, NY 10025) It's get down and giggle time, boys and girls. Put a huge smile on your face, leave pretense at the door, loosen up as much as you can, and get ready to break out laughing. Yep, what we got here is the funniest, wackiest, most insanely kickin' and goofin' up a side-splitting sonic storm crazy-assed grabbag of rock, hip-hop, and electronic music to slink from the stereo in quite a spell. The diggin' beats, supremely slow'n'snaky tempos, and neatly chuggin' rhythms bump and strut all over the place with a fabulously flippant playfulness. The pleasingly crisp vocals, witty wordplay, and the band's hilariously self-deprecating sense of humor round off the goodies to be savored on this delightfully daffy irreverent beaut. All in all, this is one cool-ass gut-buster of an album.

THIS DAY AND AGE - *Start Over on Monday* (Refining The Dynamic, 296 Hyland Rd., Depew NY 14043) A catchy, breezy, frequently sweet and harmonic, and occasionally pretty gritty rock gem, done with an utterly beguiling purity and sincerity that's impossible to either resist or dislike. The exquisitely dulcet vocals project a fabulously crystalline sense of wide-open honesty and emotionalism. The divinely tuneful arrangements, dynamically filled out by jaunty guitars, sturdy drums, and stately piano, are quite polished without ever becoming overly slick or flashy. Best of all, the sublimely sonorous and soothing music itself possesses a simple, direct, a bracingly urgent quality that's given considerable impact and immediacy by eschewing ti up razzle-dazzle for a more spare, straightforward, largely unadorned style that's a total treat to hear. Sometimes gentle and lulling, at other times more tough and rockin', always bright, vital, earnest, and melodic, this album overall rates as one to relish.

BIGGER THAN A BREADBOX (The Clashing Plaid, PU Box 321 Ridgefield Park, NJ 07660) This marvelously catchy, groovy, and soulful pop-rock album breezes along with an infectiously ceaseless bounce and panache that's a real treat to hear. The nicely easy'n'raspy vocals exude an utterly disarming charm. The tunefully hoppin' arrangements are the definite funky-diggin' goods: seriously boss cutting guitars, thick churning basslines, massively thudding clip-clop drums, and, perhaps the tastiest featured instrumental icing on an already mighty yummy cake, a supremely bitchin', zoned to the harmonically buzzing bone organ that gets down and chills out like nobody's goddamn business. The chunky beats and steadily bumpin'n'chuggin' tempos take the listener on one helluva fun, blithesome, and hugely enjoyable aural joy ride. Cheery, vibrant, and refreshingly carefree and humorous, this honey sizes up as a total blast.

JERSEY JAMS, JERSEY CARES: A Charitable Tribute to the New Jersey Families of September 11 (Bergen County's United Way, 690 Kinderkamack Road, Oradell, NJ 07649) I must admit that I wasn't looking forward to listening to this 15 track, various artists compilation concerninning September 11, 2001. You see, I've been foolishly trying to file that awful day away and basically forget it so I could get on with my life. Luckily, listening to this album offered me a potent reminder that 9/11 shouldn't be shrugged off as if it was some minor incident. Starting with the jazzy mellowness of Bernie Worrell and the Woo Warriors' supremely soulful "Thank Ya," hitting an especially poignant peak with the beautifully lulling folk-pop ballad "Understand" by the Matt Angus Thing, and Levon Helm & Seth Alexander's deeply moving "Back to You (Song)," and Swampadelica's incredibly affecting "Water," and ending on an uplifting closing note with Scrap Daddy's gloriously upbeat "Never Again," all the proper shocked, saddened, and above all resilient responses to that dismal day are present and accounted for. Sure, listening to this album brought back some painfully rough memories pertaining to that horrific day; but amidst all the expected (and totally appropriate) sadness, anguish and despair, there's plenty of hope, defiance, unity, and perseverance to be heard here as well. A fitting, touching, thoughtful, and, most surprisingly, even optimistic and inspirational aural document of a none of us should ever forget.

STEVE LIBERACE - *Believe 2 Become* (www.SteveLiberace.com) Right from the divim funky opening cut ~~54! Bunny Style" one can immediately surmise that this perky little r gonna be one extremely hip, smooth, and tres cool calmly groovin' to a supremely mello~ insouciant flavorsome tropical rock vibe kinda album. And it most surely is, what with Si warmly soothing voice, the gracefully harmonic and percolating arrangements, giddy, upl sensibility, funny lyrics ("Alone With You" in particular is an absolute hoot about a chee obsessive creepoid stalker), and casual ebb and flow of the pleasantly laid-back rhythms putting the listener in a nicely relaxed state of mind.

SPYVANFIOE (147 N. 600 W. Valparáiso, IN 46385) Three firmly in the smoothly buzz aural twilight zone young white guys from Indiana trip out in the most casually jammin'i possible on this nicely laid-back 12 track impromptu instrumental album. The funky-riffi guitars, fat slogging basslines, and heavy-clanging drums blend together to create a stead: of gradually bumpin' tempos and thick trudging beats that cast a seductively slow, serene oftentimes supremely spacy spell. The overall sense of totally calm and unhurried languor may very well be an acquired taste, but yours truly personally found this divinely low-key and unpretentious outpouring of coolly flying off into the heady sonic stratosphere grooviness an ideal source of lazily happening noise to relax, sit back, and chill out to.

CHEATER SLICKS - *Yer Last Record* (In the Red Records, 1118 W. Magnolia Blvd. . Burbank CA 91506) This splendidly scrappy baby is one of the darkest, foulest, ugliest, and most hideously primitive coughed-up-from-the-bottom-of-the-rumbling-sonic-scuzzbucket bummed out garagey rock'n'roll albums I've heard in quite a while. It's the kind of dankly bleak and depressing slow- trudging sludgy noise were barely coherent snot-choked mumble-grumble vocals angrily spit out grim lyrics about despair, alienation, and hopelessness in frightfully direct terms. The wonderfully rickety'n'raggedy-ass rattling arrangements are pure nastily strangulated spew: clanging in the dismal void drums, stinging staccato guitar riffs, and savagely scraping hacksaw basslines all grinding away with a certain remorseless precision and occasional wild-assed go-for-it piledriving vigor. The crawling tempos and slogging beats further enhance the overall mood of total defeated gloom, thereby adding a harrowing bluesy edge to the already down proceedings. Pretty and uplifting this ferociously atonal racket sure ain't, but I still dug it for its admirably uncompromising harshness and nihilism alone.

DAMNATION - *The Unholy Sounds of Damnation* (R.A.F.R. Records, 11054 Ventura Blvd #205 Studio City, CA 91604) This marvelously morbid and maniacal pack of caterwauling Los Angeles punk lunatics are the authentic gnarly article, hitting hard and fast with a rough, mangy, furiously quick'n'snappy aural assault that eschews pretense in favor of a totally unsubtle, but still kick-ass sledgehammer approach to banging out a tune. The lead singer's clearly a top honors graduate from the open up and holler real loud school of shriek-singing. The guitar joyfully destroys his much-abused axe with a steady succession of string-shredding tiffs. The dementoid drummer demolishes his skins with completely psychotic abandon. The grungy basslines are pretty raw and rippin' as well. Stand-out tracks include the incredibly sick "Fuel Injected Priest," a positively brutal mangling of the pleasant the Mamas and the Papas' classic folk-pop ditty "California Dreaming" called "California Demons," the superbly snarly "Shut The Hell Up!," and the surprisingly poignant closing cut, "R.I.P."

GARLER (garler@mindspnng.com) Starting out with the beautifully bluesy and lulling country-tinged melancholy of the deeply touching "I Found Out," hitting its heavily funkified psychedelic peak with the awesomely earthy and slithery gut-puncher "Dirty Girl," and closing things on a lovely, quietly meditative note with the exquisitely delicate "Midnight," this totally up-to-snuff 5-song EP offers a winning package of alternately rough-groovin' and sweetly melodic pop-rock soulfulness that's further graced by gorgeously poetic introspective lyrics. Jale's wonderfully raspy, yet still dulcet and soothing vocals are a sumptuously supple marvel to hear. The cutting, way cool, wah-wah-flavored guitar riffs fluidly wind to a seamlessly flowing forward-ho rhythm, while the sturdy drums maintain a firm, constant beat and the liquid basslines remain unflagging from start to finish.

MANDA AND THE MARBLES - *More Seduction* (Go-Kart Records, PO Box 20 Prince St. Station New York, NY 10012) 12 real sparky and stirring songs of retro-70's /80's New Waveish pop-punk that skillfully blends smart lyrics, amazingly bouncy'n'catchy hooks, and very dynamically kickin' and surgin' arrangements, all boppin' and jumpin' with infectiously giddy and vibrant abandon. Manda Marble's divinely vivacious vocals radiate a certain irresistibly perky pluck and charm. The crunchy'n'punchy guitars cut loose with a steady succession of fiercely rippin' riffs, the gritty basslines hover in the air like a tunefully tweaked hornets' nest, and the meaty, mightily pounding drums keep the steamrolling beats quite chunky and tasty throughout. Sweetening the whole already deliciously energetic deal is a beguiling sense of total bliss and effervescence that's a simple joy to hear. A sheer delight.

TORA! TORA! TORANCE! - *Get Into it* (The Militia Group, 7823 Warner Ave. Suite K, Huntington Beach, CA 92847) A fabulously flipped-out blast of pure snotty, noisy, batty, screw pretense and let 'er rip somethin' manic garage-punk insanity from five delightfully irreverent and hyperactive Minneapolis rock'n'roll hellions. The exuberantly yelled vocals scream away in a gloriously berserko manner. The hard-charging tempos go from fast to slow to fast again with exhilarating suddenness. The hammering beats never let up for a minute. The strenuously diggin' sonic workouts twist and turn in a wonderfully surprising and unpredictable willy-nilly fashion. The power-riffin' guitars shred everything in their path, the wildly crashing drums fall all over the place, and the churning basslines spit up steaming chunks of roiling fury. These crazed kooks whip themselves into a hormonal frenzy with "Hottest Pants," get sweetly mellow'n'melodic on "Upstairs Bedroom At A Party," and end the frantic festivities on a lovely serene note with the beautifully lulling "Remember the Alamo." A terrifically nutty pip.

ARI VAIS - *Winter Wonderland* (Run Wrongways Records, 104 South Street, Northampton MA 01060) Hands down one of the damnest and most strikingly idiosyncratic pop-rock albums I've recently heard. Occasionally sloppy, wildly unpredictable, and always bracing, sincere, and passionate, the music itself varies from tough and aggressive to soft and melodic with exhilarating abruptness, never once lapsing into a tried'n'true formula pattern. Ari Vais' hoarse, cracking, and achingly delicate tenor exudes a totally disarming honesty and vulnerability as he mulls his way through romantic troubles and life's endless supply of heart-crushing hardships with spot-on affecting courage, candor, and a winningly wry sense of humor. The divinely funky and biting guitar tiffs, wonky synthesizers, and solid, sinewy drums swirl to an arrestingly aquatic rhythmic ebb and flow, creating a chunky, churning, surgingly thick and heavy sound which constantly fluctuates between being gracefully tuneful and furiously hard-kickin' with often striking results.

BASTARDS OF MELODY – *Break Up* (Ransom Records, 31 Griffith Street Jersey City, NJ 07307) I listened to this wonderfully vibrant and exuberant pop-rock album after an especially hellish and exhausting day at work; its steady succession of speedy tempos and hammering beats boppin' and hoppin' with infectiously tireless buoyancy and vivacity perked up my previously sagging spirits real good at a time when I really needed it most. Granted, the breezy vocals, genuinely uplifting sense of good-natured optimism, and terrifically crisp, catchy and tuneful arrangements help matters a lot as well. Furthermore, I've always been a sucker for neatly thrashin' wah-wah-enhanced guitars and strong, muscular drums. But ultimately it's the sweetly upbeat and sunny vibe that permeates the whole album like a bright, cheery, endless rainbow reaching forth into the sky which clinches this honey's status as a bonafide all-out winner.

THE BLAM - *The Blam* (www.theblam.com) Hey, do you really dig those albums that get down and rock out in a neatly direct, jangly, thrillingly crisp and bang-up efficient manner? Y'know what I'm talking about. The type of album where needless pretense and excess polish take a welcome back seat to straightahead streamlined movin' and groovin', with sturdy drums, beautifully fluid guitars, and seamlessly flowing basslines smoothly pushing forward to a ceaselessly steady and syncopated chug-a-lug bumpin' rhythm. Toss in funky zoned-to-the-bone synthesizer washes, marvelously clear and unaffected raspy vocals, dead simple and uncomplicated lyrics, fabulously plain, just the bare essentials arrangements, and a certain kicked-back, yet still rousing vitality that gets the exciting job done without ever forcing given point. Mix together, stir it up a bit, but never shake too hard, and the net result is a totally ingratiating little lo-fi pip of an album.

KILL HENRY SUGAR - *Sell This Place* (Surprise Truck Entertainment, P.O. Box 4077 Hollywood, CA 90078-4077) Bridging an often overlooked gap between mellow, meditative lounge and more fiercely cookin' full-bore rock'n'roll, the eleven tracks which fill out this album frequently start out slow and subtle, gradually building with exquisite grace, delicate harmony, and a surging sense of urgency to always melodic and sometimes explosive crescendos. The stirring opening song "Mussolini" sets the tone for the considerable sonic excitement to come. The neatly thudding chug'n'bop rhythmic heave-ho of "Little Faker," the supremely hearty country-tinged bravado of "His Trumpet's Gone," and the divinely laid-back languor of "Rodeo" qualify as definite highlights. The splendidly smooth vocals, nicely sardonic lyrics, tunefully tasty arrangements, sharp guitar tiffs, sturdy, but subdued drums, and general sense of deliciously diverse aural eclecticism round off the significant assets to be found in this hugely enjoyable outing.

SUPERMODEL STALKER - *The Glory* of(My Little Empire, 7304 5th Avenue, Suite 329, Brooklyn, NY 11209) A terrifically quirky and off-kilter indie rock surprise, this incredibly funky and wonky album finds a distinctly bubbly, sludgy, fiercely chooglin' and swirlin' jazzoid prog-rock groove with its startling opening instrumental track "Glory." The subsequent songs are all over the place, running the gamut from delicate and melodic pop to hard and scrappy rock to even tunefully twangy country (!) with often bang-up thrilling results. On-and-off tempos, chunky, but restrained beats, alternately sweetly mellow and harshly yelled vocals, intricately harmonic arrangements, tight, but still wild and excitingly spontaneous playing, and a marvelously open-minded "try it, do it" experimental avant-garde sensibility are wonderfully predominant from stunning start to freaky finish. In short, this is the type of fabulously flipped, no-holds-barred all-out sonic freakathon where standard musical conventions are boldly disregarded in favor of audaciously exploring and staking out heretofore uncharted aural realms. So throw aside your customary average music expectations and prepare to be blown away by the staggering scope of freshness, vitality, imagination, and pure blithesme creativity evident in every last oddball cut found on this gloriously eccentric outing.

THE LEPERS - *The Love From Above* (Caulfield Records, POB 84323 Lincoln, NE 68501) This remarkably potent and just plain weird album has a strange way of sticking around in your memory long after its finished playing. Maybe it's the ominously moody and atmospheric arrangements, with cuttingly precise guitars and stirringly subdued, yet persistent drums creating a marvelously brooding and anguished soundscape that's nothing but regret, sadness, and pure all-out soul-wrenching desolation. Or perhaps the superbly gradual way the menacingly slow tempos and chunkily trudging beats lurch along to a remorselessly relaxed rhythmic momentum. The haunted, tremulous, whispery vocals likewise pack an unusually strong sonic punch. The occasional instrumentals, particularly the startling opening track "Finale," build to excitir crashing and thundering crescendos with heart-racing ferocity. Music this uncompromisingly dark, spare, and tormented may not be everybody's cup of exquisitely black and bitter joe, but I personally found its very unclassifiable peculiarity alone quite savory and engrossing.

MAGNET - *Caffeine Superstar* (Magnetic Records) The massively depressing opening double whammy of "Over Easy" and "Slow Dive" suggest that this gloomily downbeat and atmospheric album is going to be a seriously heavy slog through the totally down-in-the-dumps pop-rock quagmire. And indeed it most often is exactly that, with drearily blurted vocals, dismal lyrics, wobbly, wonky, grimly lurching ahead tempos, thickly plodding beats, and muted, arrangements all firmly locked into a joylessly sluggish vibe that's anything but cheery and vibrant. Still, for all its unsparing torpor and despair, this album somehow manages to be strangely haunting and compelling, therefore making it ideal rainy day listening.

NO SOAP RADIO (DEGY Entertainment, 1155 W. Chestnut St. # 2A, Union, NJ 07083) Starting off with the simply killer "Undone," a fiercely punchy and surging power-riffin' juggernaut that steamrolls along at an exhilaratingly steady clip, this kick-ass five track EP really hits the sonic somethin' sweet. "Don't Start," "Christina Ricci," and "Way Back Down" likewise furiously smoke. The gloriously hoarse ragged vocals, beefy guitars, jackhammer drums, and seething basslines congeal together to create the kind of thick, heavy, staggeringly forceful and visceral scraped-up-from-the-rumbling-sonic-gutbucket sound that's an absolute pleasure to hear. Most recently these guys appeared on the hit cable series *The Sopranos;* they most definitely deserve the break and are worthy of considerable crossover fame and success.

SURREY LANE - *The Long Way Home* (The Planetary Group, 368 Congress Street, Ste. 3, Boston, MA 02110) The irresistibly upbeat and uplifting opening number "You Believed" firmly sets the tone for the catchy, tunefully tasty'n'twangy folksy country-rock melodicism to come. The soulfully heartfelt vocals cut deep while the divinely harmonic arrangements and ceaselessly propulsive rhythm never hit a remotely sour or off-putting note. The songs themselves nicely alternate between poignantly reflective ballads (the lovely, lilting "Tell Me Why," the touchingly regretful "Why Do We Do") and kick-you-in-the-gut rattling rockers (the bitingly slow and menacing "Jamie," the thrilling "The Long Way Home"). The beautifully crisp guitars and sinewy drums ensure that the neatly chugging tempos and big, meaty, galloping beats remain sturdy and unflagging throughout while the bottom-heavy bass adds a hefty undertow to the already deliciously dense and layered melodies. All in all, it's one helluva damn fine album.

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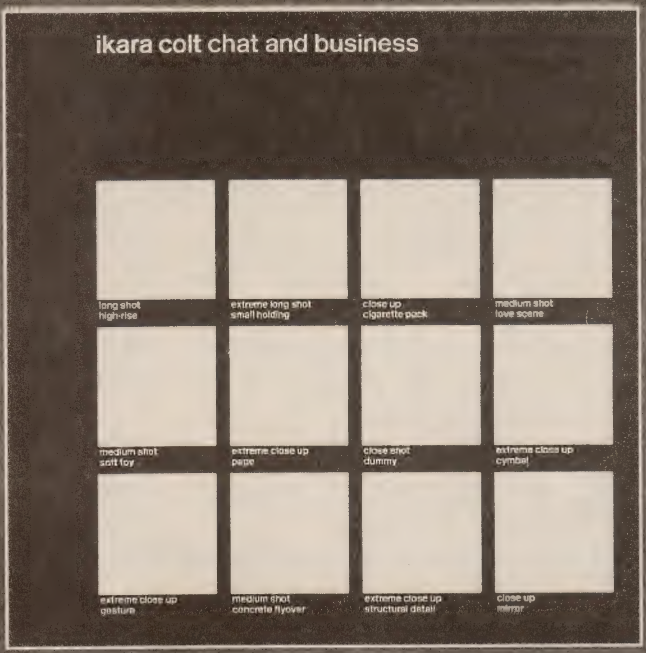

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SOUND BEYOND THE P.A.

by chuck x. wharton

Secrets of The Templars

By my count, The Templars have 30 solo or split records out there, plus 17 compilations, six upcoming records and one DVD. Two of their re-released records are reviewed below. They've just completed two public appearances displaying their oi-punk views of society, history, youth and the working class – one in Hollywood and the other in Corona, California and, as I write, are headed to West Palm Beach, Florida to appear with Terminus City, Full Flavored Kings and Damaged Case at a place called Spanky's.

I didn't expect the unexpected until I asked Phil Templar, who's played since he was 11, how he configured his drum set.

"I've never owned a drum set," he told me. "I'm like a mercenary, a lefty, a self-taught drummer. I won sticks. But I've always used other people's shit. I use whatever I can get."

It began with the television. Phil as a child, watched the earliest broadcasts of MTV, listening to new wave and early punk. A next-door neighbor had a rock and roll band and invited Phil to play the drums when they weren't practicing.

He met guitarist Carl Templar, who shares his love of late 1970s punk, oi bands, as well as British and French punk.

"We were into the same music. Even better, he played an instrument!"

Plus, Carl shares Phil's love of medieval history in general and crusaders lore in particular.

In 1990, they were jamming in Carl's garage – his brother has a drum set – and in April 1991 they formed officially, with Don Templar on bass, later replaced by Perry Templar from Chicago.

They first performed for the public in June 1992 with 411, Scapegrace and Common Ground. They soon after marched onto the stage of the DC Oi! Fest with The Bruisers, Oxblood, Wretched Ones, Patriot, Niblick Henbane and Those Unknown.

Some of those musicians regrettably have disbanded. But The Templars keep moving like the lost crusaders that Phil talks about.

"Many believe that pirates derived from the templars. The skull and crossbones image is a burial symbol of the Knights Templar. On Friday the Thirteenth, they were arrested after the pope out of greed and jealousy condemned them – they had taken an oath of poverty, so they hoarded their money. The escaped templars took to the seas to establish themselves somewhere else, burying their hoard."

So the Knights Templar provide not only some startling imagery on the band's record releases – original art by Phil and Carl – but also some themes behind their thoughts, including, Phil says, a distrust of modern banking.

The most startling imagery occurs in their music and especially their lyrics. One song, *Sirens*, creates a stark canvas of rival gangs, police, an ambulance and a dead youth. "Kids stick together on the streets they roam fighting for a place they can call their own."

The listener is left in this stark place, which is how the Templars felt when they composed the song.

"Guys we knew were getting arrested for dumb shit. Some policemen didn't give a shit about us, either. If you're going to fight, make it worth something. Just recently, a lot of people were arrested in anti-war demonstrations. That's something worth fighting for. Think about the big picture.

"A lot of people think *Clockwork Orange* is cool. That is a **sad** story. It's about a kid who had nothing better to do than engage in senseless violence. Then he's put into some kind of Frankenstein environment to get rehabilitated. In Chapter 21, the left-out chapter, he goes back to a life of crime."

All members of The Templars contribute to each song. While Phil remains in Long Island, Carl goes to school in Seattle, bassist Perry lives in Chicago and a new second guitarist, Chet is in Atlanta. Still, distance does not separate The Templars.

"We talk to each other quite a bit each week. We got over set lists on our own and squeeze in some practice before each gig. We all work together on each new song. Perry has been writing more lyrics. But usually, we all write the music and lyrics, polling ideas in our heads and putting the ideas together."

They overcome distance and responsibilities to make their music in the category of oi, loved by a variety of people, including those with the label, skinheads. Phil warns against putting ourselves in categories and living our labels, because he's seen negative results.

"Some guys I know who were involved with punk rock and skinheads have abandoned their lifestyles and denied their past. That's stupid! You don't have to label yourself and if your lifestyle changes, you can still like the music."

Music, including the music of The Templars, can be an inclusive thing.

"Anyone who goes out of their way to see us – who hears our message – is no problem with me."

While the original Knights Templar conducted a society mysterious to those outside it, the society of The Templars need not be secret to us.

All American Rejects (Dreamworks Records www.allamericanrejects.com)
Much sugary pop on top of distorted guitars in these 11 tracks. When my little sister really was little, I would buy her records like this and take her to the concerts. One of the tracks actually is a good arrangement. A couple of the arrangements have a bit of promise, especially *Too Far Gone*. While this song, too, is more pre-teen boyfriend/girlfriend schlock, the drumming and guitars start getting good. I disagree with that song's lyrics, "Teach me heartache. Stop this burning." I think these guys are musically talented, but they need more burning, disappointment, a bad grade or two, and maybe get kicked out of a club in their school, so that it shows clearly in their music. And that goes double for their producer.

Beenie Man - *Tropical Storm* (Virgin www.beenieman.net)
These 13 tracks are filled with pop and R&B hooks on a solid Jamaican foundation. *Feel It Boy* is an instantly familiar, accessible song with Janet Jackson, just like anything else involving Ms. Jackson. More musically challenging are the hard dancehall projects, my favorite of which is *Gangsta Life* followed closely by *Real Gangsta*, Jamaican-based tributes to the American rap version of rude boys. The funniest entry is Fresh From Yard, where the artist graphically proposes to Lil' Kim, and I don't mean marriage.

Capleton -*Still Blazin'* (VP Records, 89-05 138th St., Jamaica NY 11435 www.vpCapleton.com)
On these 19 tracks I find dancehall sound to excite me, plus all the new Rastarfarian-rooted rocksteady and reggae I've been looking for. The finest dancehall entry is *Cooyah Cooyah*, which I translate is calling us to "Look here!" in surprise. Among the reggae and rocksteady songs, there're *Hail King Selassie* and *Jah is Gonna Work It Out*. With this recording from Capleton, who is recognized as a prophet, I feel as if I'm welcomed home.

Daycare Swindlers - *Heathen Radio* (Go-Kart Records, PO Box 20 Prince St. Station, New York NY 10012)
Hold on to your seats while spinning this CD. You'll miss treats like when they musically quote The Beatles' Norwegian Wood in *Anne Greebie*, somehow arriving at the chorus, "I'm gonna get my party on." While the best track, musically, is *Sand Box*, my favorite is *Wolverine*, which includes good playing and great interludes of rapping delivered as if from a well-lubricated machine gun.

No Doubt *Rocksteady* (Interscope)
I looked forward to reporting to you that there was no rocksteady music on this album, but I can't. The band went to Jamaica and included the finely rendered *Underneath It All*, one of two tracks produced by Sly and Robbie. Lady Saw toasts on that one. While visiting the Island in The Sun, they also got production from Steely and Clevie, featuring some hard dancehall and toasting by Bounty Killer. I'm really surprised. Missing is Ms. Stefani's distressed emotional state that elevated the band's pop schlock efforts. While she competently performs all the tracks, some of the standard tracks just lie there, surprisingly. I miss her anger at her past romantic partners.

Sean Paul - *Studio One* (VP Records, www.vprecords.com)
You think you're pretty good at understanding Jamaican patois on the fly? This dancehall toaster makes it fly as quickly as any seasoned gangsta rapper. I struggle to keep up. In *Deport Them*, by the time I it, I've lost a verse, "Unu listen to di words wah Sean Paul a him a chat, and big-up unu self if unu deh pon di top," – which I understand as, "All of you, listen as Sean Paul chats with each and feel good about yourselves if you've made it big." The 25 tracks include some raunchy and not-so-raunchy skits. While most of the musical selections aim at fusing Jamaican influences with contemporary rap stylings, tracks like *Mek It Go, So Den* actually subtly quote the dub style, that has always been my favorite Jamaican music. Challenging stuff here.

Lee Perry - *Baffling Smoke Signal: The Upsetter Shop Volume 3* (Heartbeat, HB 252, One Camp St., Cambridge MA 02140)
Now is the time for all ska historians and lovers of Jamaican dub sounds to break open the piggy bank once more. Nearly all these 12 tracks are either previously released, at least on CD. Four are never-before-released versions. Another four, including the title track, are previously unreleased anywhere. Here are the seminal sounds delivering religious, political and style commentary. My favorite song, however, has no words at all. That is *Lizard Stick* by The Upsetters. Well-paced, meditative songs with a Caribbean upbeat always have a spot reserved in my mind.

The Piranhas *Erotic Grit Movies* (In The Red Records, 1118 W. Magnolia Blvd., PO Box 208, Burbank CA 91506)
I get the punk influence here, but with the addition of the 1960s-pop keyboard and the high-tension vocals, the atmosphere runs sometimes toward the circus, other times toward theatre-of-the-absurd. On the first listen, I feared this CD would require too much work on my part. By the third attempt, I approached the stage with great anticipation, or is it the big top? The sideshow, maybe? To show you the way this work can grow on a psyche, my least favorite instrument at first was Ami's keyboard. By the third hearing, I was with her every chord. I wonder, though, if Gentle Jamie's vocals need always be so desperately sung.

Saliva - *Back into Your System* (Island Records)
If you're looking for this band's sound you heard in that Vin Diesel movie, that would be *Raise Up*. It's just as enjoyable as the previous song. The remaining 11 tracks feature more singing and a lot less rapping and shouting, although most of the guitar playing is plenty loud. The band is trying out more hard rock ballads and even a couple of not-so-hard ballads. While they look and often sound like shouters and rappers, they're actually pretty good balladeers, which I'm disappointed to report.

Lady Saw - *Raw: The Best of Lady Saw* (VP Records)
Excellent selections in 19 tracks from this artist's large and personally penned reggae and dancehall library. Most of the entries detail her frustrations in romantic relationships, including *Healing* sung with Beenie Man. Her smoky voice and rich, percussive arrangements keep up the interest, even when the lyrics don't. Her relationship problems are most difficult to understand when in *Find a Good Man*, she says, "Dear God, I know a good man is very hard to find but dear Lord, please find someone who will come home at night." I think there must be a lot more to it than that.

Sum 41 - *Does This Look Infected* (Island Def Jam Music Group www.sum41.com)
Here's another band that gets all the questions and accusations, but still has fun. It shows in all their rapid-fire, distorted-guitar songs. This is especially true in *Still Waiting*, "Ignorance and understanding, we're the first ones to jump in line, out of step for what we believe in. But who's left to start the pleading? How far will we take this? It's not hard to see through the sickness" But the best arrangement is "Billy Spleen," with an introduction quoting Jimi Hendrix, then perhaps quotes a hardcore melody, before entering the band's familiar territory. Much to enjoy in these 12 accessible tracks.

System of a Down - *Chic 'n' Stu* (Columbia)
So many times I wonder how talented musical groups have avoided a decent record distribution contract. In the case of these 16 tracks, I wonder how such outstanding talent actually have exploded from the underground and got distribution. I pick up inspiration from 1960s psychedelia, 1970s art-rock, death-metal, Latin influences and funny-punk stuff. The best arrangement is *Boom!* This one features a preachy spoken-word section about bombs, religious hypocrisy and starving children, but it works surrounded by the strong supporting instruments. Outstanding effort.

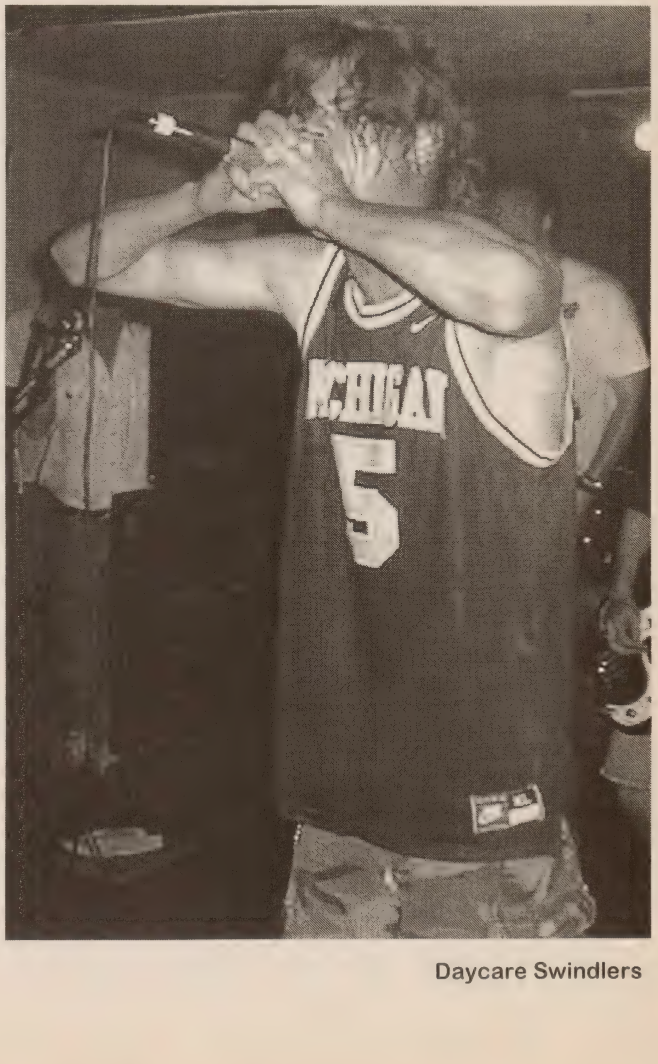
The Templars - *Phase Two* (GMM Records, PO Box 15234, Atlanta GA 30333 www.thetemplars.com)
These 16 tracks are some of the best produced that I've heard from this band. The songs continue their themes warning others on behalf of their fellow skins that they live life on their own terms, as in *Kids of Today*, "Don't need your religion. Don't your laws. Don't need your system and all its flaws...We're the kids of today." This recording takes the band's lead guitar playing up several notches.

The Templars - *The Return of Jacques de Molay* (GMM Records www.gmmrecords.com)
The band pounds ahead on Phil Templar's drumming the themes of workers rights, as *in Those Who Build This Country*. They don't neglect the foundation of their music in songs such as *Skinheads Rule OK* and *Pride*, "Pride can be a source of division . Don 't let your pride distort your vision. Don 't take your pride to extremes. Don 't fill your mind with racist dreams." Karl Fritzcher's guitar work continues to shine. The band and its songs are sharp.

Compilations

The U.S. of Oi! Volume II (GMM Records)
Some of the 20 tracks are a little lo-fi, others are brilliantly produced like *Get Out Alive* by The Rogues. I can't argue against any for a inclusion in a collection of essential skins music, plus one rap entry by D-Caf and the Ft. Knox Crew of Washington, D.C. All the themes are here: the working class, rebellion, fighting, politics and oppression, and drinking. In *No Rhyme, No Reason*, New Jersey's Those Unknown sing for fighting against a system that rips up playgrounds and enact labor reforms that feed the system but put citizenry at peril. "They said it couldn't be but they brought us to our knees and we said if that ever happened, we would fight. And now we're living off our past and we're living on our dreams. I said I'm not gonna take it...I'm gonna fight."

Send records or zines for review to Chuck Wharton, 11922 Westheimer Road, PMB 368, Houston TX 77077-6694. You can also forward comments and questions there, or e-mail ChuckX@Ev1.Net if you want.



Daycare Swindlers

DEMOS

ELECTRIC ENGINE

AFTER THE BATH – demo (www.afterthebath.com) -- From the opening strains of "Fear," it's clear we aren't dealing with a typical low-end demo band here. After the Bath, despite having a pretty horrid moniker, are a bit of an anomaly; there's a little Jimmy Eat World/Get Up Kids in their melodies, some older Cave-In in their screamier bits, and some new-wave electronics thrown in for good measure. Lurching, catchy vocal lines and guitar riffs position this in the boundaries of good taste, although these four songs often threaten to jump over to the dark side. What's most surprising, and what has to be commended, is the maturity of this band; some groups can't nail a sound this together until their third or fourth recording session. After the Bath should find a home and some much-needed record label support in no time. – Jason Schreurs

CHICKEN McHEAD (11 Gargon Terrace, Southwick, MA, 01077) The best thing about this Massachusetts band is their demo's cover art and the story behind their name. Supposedly, in November of 2000, a woman ordered a box of test-market chicken wings at a McDonald's in Virginia and was aghast when she discovered a fully intact deep-fried chicken's head in her box. The picture on the cover of this CD is as disgusting as any gore-grind band could dream up, with the chicken's beak, eyes and head frill clearly identifiable under all of that deep-fried batter. Okay, so that story really takes a back seat to the unimaginative garage rock on this demo CD. To make a huge stretch, this could be compared to The Cramps, or even Gas Huffer, but it's boring, overproduced garbage that fans of those bands will only get annoyed by. Great chicken head story though, eh? - Jason Schreurs

CIAMPI – "No Work" (mferraro182@aol.com) On track one we get to hear what happens when a singer tries for notes out of his range and misses-in the middle of the hook, each time that catch-line reared its head. Yeah, yeah, this is a punk zine and most acts aren't equipped with a Pavarotti-level vocalist, but when you're just strumming and singing without a backing band, you should really not try to make me wince during your hook. Sorry, man. Track 2's predictable but not bad - he leaves the high notes alone and instead mushes the words together a la Springsteen, this isn't much of an improvement. "Taste & Forget" was the most promising with its monotone singing and guitar work that was engaging and Nirvana-ish at parts-once he insisted on going up an octave and the wincing started anew, but that was just a bridge and the song rebounded. Notice I'm not bitching about your music per se-take voice lessons or stay in your range or expect this kind of review. - Mike Chant

DR. ROCKET - 4 song demo (Jon Andrew (973)472-2508) When a band with a demo this poorly produced puts it on a CD, I have to ask, "Why?" The singer wavers between Jagger and Dee Snider, which I can't help but believe is more a matter of coincidence than evidence of skill. With the exception of the fourth (sucked!), the songs aren't bad. The first was like a seventh generation Ramones, the second like vintage Nirvana (just not as well executed). Good luck, guys - in terms of songwriting, it's a promising start… - Mike Chant

DIVERS LUST - Demo 2002 (http://community-2.webtv.net/diverslust/DiversLust) Good pop rock, like you'd hear in a club playing Blur and Britpop mixed with sometimes grungy stuff. Midrange, non-intrusive vocals set to a rich soundscape of well-blended chord-powered music. Think driving, spacey grunge, the same hook placement, but ultimately upbeat, and you're on the right path. Standout tracks include: "Dreams" and "Saturday (Feelin' Blue)." The energy is there and the vibe is positive. Keep an eye out for these guys… - Mike Chant

DIVINITY DESTROYED (PO Box 1686, Toms River, NJ, 08753) – There's something about New Jersey having better quality demo releases than most places. Usually a demo CD has me running and screaming in the opposite direction, but if it's from NJ, hey, I'm giving it a chance. I'm not exactly sure the cause of this phenomenon, maybe it's some weird chemical reaction to Bon Jovi, or maybe the unsigned talent pool is just stronger in Jersey. Either way, Divinity Destroyed are yet another indie band from NJ who impress. That's not to say this is hot shit or anything, like all demo releases this still has certain limitations. The playing could be tightened up and they're stuck with that demo-sounding wind tunnel production sound, but Divinity Destroyed do have an abundance of cool ideas. They call themselves "world metal," which is the best way to describe it, really. Imagine Tool meshed with nu-metal and In Extremo. I know, I know, that ain't sounding too impressive but, believe me, somehow this rocks. – Jason Schreurs

ELECTRIC ENGINE – "Music Building" Demo (timr1732@aol.com) One of the great qualities of certain American voices is the ability to convey sadness with nothing more than timbre and inflection. I'm not talking about self-pity or angst, but a kind of world-weary melancholy that tells you that the person singing has been wrung dry through the wringer of life. Neil Young comes to mind, as does Jeff Tweedy, and the great John Prine, and Johnny Cash, of course; and then there're the two guys singing in Electric Engine, Tim Reedy and Tom Rigney (both formerly of The Moths.) Reedy's "Got Drunk" and "Sonia Dora" and Rigney's "Best Laid Plans" are the kind of jukebox classics that have been selling boilermakers in roadside gin mills since the days of Hank Williams. Even when they pick up the tempo and trade the acoustics for electric guitars, as on Rigney's "Eleanor of Acquitaine," there's a palpable pain behind the toothy smile. And while we're wallowing in misery and crying in our beer, give a listen to Reedy's literate and witty "Lunar Rover" or his very Neil Young-ish "Laugh Riot," or Rigney's raw acoustic demo version of "Say You Don't," before you order another round. And don't forget to order one for Joe Dessereau behind the drums, who holds all this together so steadily and tastefully. Feeling bad never felt so good. – Jim Testa

FORTUNATO - EP (www.fortunatorocks.com, allhailfortunato@aol.com) All right, I just reviewed something really shitty so I'm in a mood when I set up my contact info above for the band and I laughed my ass off at the email handle, which was made even funnier by the hotmail crossed out and the AOL penned above it - ballsy and clumsy! Bonus points for laughs! Fast, angry punk; the singer sounds like the grandson of Lemme from Motorhead and it's a good match for their gritty guitars and nonstop energy. "Shalom" rocks! Check 'em out! - Mike Chant

BILL FRIED - 4-song demo (www.billfried.net) Bill Fried started out as a drummer – in metal bands, at that – before switching to guitar in mid-life and resuming his career as a singer-songwriter. Although the artwork on his CD demo shows a goateed dude with an acoustic guitar, the songs here suggest that he's still experimenting with finding a sound. "Own Somebody" is a full-band, funk/rock workout, while "How Dare You" is a mostly-acoustic, melodramatic ballad that sounds like a less whiney, less nasal, but no less recriminating Billy Corgan. "One More Time" and "Really Alive" both start off as laconic love songs that erupt into big swelling choruses ala' the Goo Goo Dolls, in a style that radio people refer to as AAA (but which anyone reading Jersey Beat would probably find a mite shmaltzy.) Although the arrangements and instrumentation display undeniable craft, I found Fried's voice a bit too thin for the Neil Diamond-esque shtick he was trying to pull off, and personally, I'd like to see him stick to the simple, heartfelt acoustic stuff, which he pulls off much better. – Jim Testa

I DREAMED OF POMPEII - (www.idreamedofpompeii.com) A high energy rock start, crushed by a need to stop dead and infuse an annoying finger-picking guitar session coupled with equally annoying whiny lyrics that almost steer the song into Styx-land. This happens throughout the disc. There are good songs within their songs but the pieces sound unrefined, like they can't bring themselves to flush the shitty parts and the songs suffer for it. Streamline, get your singer to dump the wimpy nasal stuff, and get back to us. - Mike Chant

CHRIS KATRIS – (Ckatris@aol.com) The abrupt beginning made me think my CD player was messed-up - then I was hooked! How to describe it...think of some Tom Petty fattened by some of Dylan's more rocking moments...now add this: Think of your favorite God-Why-Don't-They-Retire band from the Seventies or Eighties, then think of that band doing a turnaround and putting out something mind-blowing... Chris Katris has that quality, old made new done the way it's supposed to be done. Great piano and guitar compositions shine in "Let It Rise," and "I Won't Let It Go" dips its feet in Pink Floyd's pool, and look at that! The man's smart, too-his best song, "Without Her Love" is first...wow, it can happen... Should you make it down to the Philly area, let me know by emailing the zine - good job, good luck! - - Mike Chant

KEMICAL AGENT – "Up at the Spot" (montgomeryj@webtv.net) If these guys make it, the musical bar for rap will be raised! I'm not kidding-I have not heard a rap band that was more musically inventive than Kemical Agent. From the I-can-do-this-shit swagger on "So Much" to the touching eulogy delivered in "Happiness Never Lasts," rapper Sener One's got the attitude and rhymes to keep your attention. The bass has the vibe of a John Carpenter movie soundtrack (I can't think of a bass line in recent years meaner than the one driving "Steady Nod." And the one in "Eye for an Eye" was soo..killer, too...). The guitar synth player is the band's transporter room-importing all manners of instruments and sounds, from the ominous strings on "Kemical Agent" to the flutes on the marihuana-anthem, "Kind Language," and loads more. The percussion is a phat blend of live and electronic beats, and the samples are too cool. Often dark, always grooving, I gotta say I will be disappointed if good things don't happen for this band. Y'all raised the bar, may the world see it... - Mike Chant

MERIDIANS DIVIDED – "Blind" (www.angelfire.com/il/meridiansdivided) Ewwww.......drawn-out, pretentious artsy stuff that makes you wait for something better to happen to the song. It doesn't. - Mike Chant

MIKELL'S PLOT – "Somewhere In This World Stalks The Thing That Is..." 3-song demo (Michael O'Connor, PO Box 22, Sayreville NJ 08822) This sounds like something you might hear on Dr. Demento or Howard Stern. It's pretty basic guitar rock, with somebody's tongue stuck way up their cheek. At least, I *think* this is supposed to be funny. The first track, "Monsters On The Wall," is sort of a spooky Misfits-ish rock number with creepy-crawly mock-horror lyrics. "Show Me Funk 50" is a raunchy funk tune with hot girl backup singers about an orgy (the singer's girlfriend brings over 49 friends and...) And "Shit List" is a song about, well, the guy's shit list. A note tells me that this was recorded with studio musicians but there is now an actual band called Mikell's Plot out there. – Jim Testa

DENNIS MOST & THE INSTIGATORS (POB 380152, E. Hartford, CT 06138-0152) Apparently he's making a comeback after 15 years and has a best of LP "Excuse my Spunk" on Italy's RaveUp Records. His career dates back to '79 with a hit sing of the same name and "Destructive Love". Just because I have never heard of him doesn't mean this doesn't rock – thumping thundering guitars with a pissed of sneer of an attitude backed with a touch of rockabilly. Go check them out on wwwdennismostinstigator.com - Tom Brebric

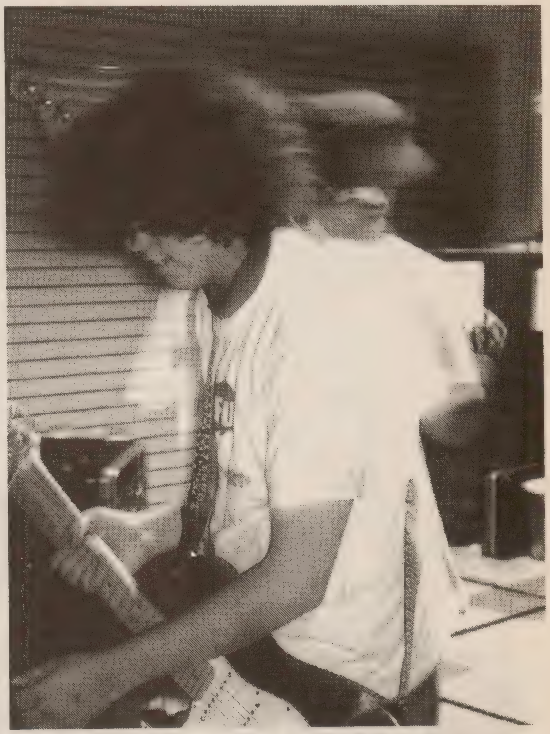
MR. STOOPS – 4 song demo (mrstoops.cjb.net) I have no idea where Mt. Ephraim, NJ might be, but I'd be willing to plan a trip there if I had a chance to check out Mr. Stoops, a promising young pop-punk combo who calls that hamlet home. Their demo starts off with a rollicking garagey number that reminded me instantly of Dramarama (remember their hit, "Anything Anything"?) except for the bridge, which turned into this weird-but-funny death-metal voice-of-Satan thing before switching back into pop-punk mode. "Confinement" is the heaviest of the four songs, throwing a bit of hard rock in the mix, but most of this CD is lighthearted pop-punk in the Queers/Screeching Weasel style, with catchy melodies, short but memorable guitar solos, and quick head-bobbing tempos. The band – now a trio - reports that it is currently looking for a second guitarist and should resume playing shows this Spring as a four-piece. I'll be looking for them when they start playing out again (I just hope it's not in Mt. Ephraim, wherever that is.) – Jim Testa

NATIONAL EYE - (ok, here's the deal: there are two discs, both untitled, both with different songs, both with the same cover art only one's yellow and the other's blue) (National Eye, PO Box 5273, Yeadon, PA 19050, www.nationaleye.com, feedback@nationaleye.com) Now that that lengthy description of what I'm reviewing is out of the way, I can proceed with the flogging! Wait...nothing to flog them for...the bastards... Truly unique! And I'll even add, "In a good way!" Think of the really whacked stuff Bowie and Floyd and Neil Young must have recorded in their haziest, most drug abused days, the stuff ultimately discarded at the bequest of sober managers...now imagine someone refining those pieces into really cool, and often really wild, songs! These guys aren't afraid to get weird-see "Copy of a Copy." "New Cinema River Murder Ballad" has my vote for most amusing song title. It's not hard to imagine any of these songs in a David Lynch movie. Definitely worth the experience. - Mike Chant

THE REASON (thereasonrock@aol.com) A good, youthful-sounding rock band! It wouldn't be a stretch to imagine them opening for the likes of Weezer or Puddle of Mudd (the demo practically screams this on "In Your Room"). The songs don't break any new ground but their spirit more than makes up for their lack of exploration-if you want to listen to a promising start go to www.mp3.com/the_reasonNJ. - Mike Chant

REASON TO BELIEVE - (www.reasontobelieve.cjb.net) More teeny party rock for the Jimmy Eat World set...they do what they're shooting for well...not sure what I can say past that since I'm not really a big fan of this kind of music, but I will say I saw no deficiencies in their execution of it. It's the same, young voice singing just far enough off-key not to hurt the song's appeal, the thin chugga-chugga-chugga chords, the beats thrash drummers would play for laughs in mockery of glam before they both ended up in VH-1's late night archives... Tracks four and five were my favorite-that they ended up last shows their age. A manager-type looking for this sort of thing could do worse than take on these guys. - Mike Chant

THE ROSARIO FOCUS – "Demonstration Number One" (www.therosariofocus.com) The welcome comes from a gothic-type voice, you know, warped with a somewhat vampiric quality to it. The beats are great! The music? Think The Cure, only less grating and a bit more disgruntled. The effects and the overall mood are reminiscent of The Baus Haus. "The Desire of K.C." is a ball-sort of like the grandson of the Rolling Stones' "Sympathy For the Devil" in its structure and the way the midrange free versing is presented. The music is sometimes dark, sometimes trippy, and frequently impressive enough to earn a "Good job, guys!" - Mike Chant



The Slycaps **(Photo by Colleen Umberger)**

THE SLYCAPS (www.theslycaps.com) This is the Manahawkin, NJ high-school band that received a professional makeover on MTV's "Made" show. In fact, they recorded this demo as part of the makeover process on the show. The show depicted the band as well-intentioned kids in a barely-competent ska-punk band who didn't rehearse enough and didn't have a clue about DIY promotion. Of course, we all know how little "reality" is actually depicted on reality TV, but whatever MTV did for the Slycaps apparently paid off. This is some fine pop/punk, with ear-pleasing vocals and some catchy melodies. "Time Goes Slow" sounds like a Green Day outtake, a mid-tempo lovesick ballad with chunky chords, harmony vocals on the hooks, and a simple but effective guitar solo. "Don & Sue" is the real surprise, a wonderfully effective slice of blue-eyed soul that the music segments on "Made" never hinted at. "The Boring Life" features the ska/punk style that we heard on "Made;" this sounds like something the Bouncing Souls could have recorded during their Argyle phase, with clever backup vocals and a really solid beat. "Sleep Walking," recorded live, is more Green Day-styled pop/punk. Overall, this gets at least a B+ and I'll definitely catch these guys the next time they play around here. Never mind the MTV, here's the Slycaps. – Jim Testa

SOVENSKYA – 3 song demo (www.sovenkysa.com) A song demo featuring Craig Cirenelli of Elemae on vocals. This is a lot slower, more romantic, almost dreamy than his other band – 3 gently murmuring ballads with a nod to the British shoegazer crowd. Very soft, very pretty, very calm and relaxing. – Jim Testa

SPEARING JOCASTA - 3 song demo (Ryan Csolak, 67 Leuckel Ave. Trenton NJ 08619) They're calling this metal-emo-core sound "screamo" now; if that's what you like, you could do a lot worse than this Trenton quintet, which features former members of Clubber Lang, Another Nothing, and Industrial Fate. "Failing As An Occupation" and "Breaking On The Wheel" bookend the CD with a heavy metalcore throb, but it's the middle track, "The Cassandra Complex," that impresses most, with its buoyant danceable vibe and howling vocal that recalls the best parts of Thursday. Like Geoff Rickly, lead singer Kevin (no last names) screams and sings at the same time, a neat feat that a lot of more purely metal and hardcore bands might do well to emulate. That extra dab of melody gives Spearing Jocasta not just power but nuance, something to listen to while you're throttling your pals in the pit. – Jim Testa

TAPPING THE VEIN – "Undone" (PO Box 187, Media, PA, !9063) Please bear with the full-of-myself preface. I've been a music critic for over a decade. I've been a musician for much longer. As a critic, I do try to be fair. If your songs don't appeal to me personally, I weigh how what you're offering might appeal to others - I'll get it if it's there and mention it, too. But I know in the course of being a reviewer, I've pissed off many of you dreamers out there (and a few in this issue, too). Why? Because I don't hand out good reviews if I think you suck, and I'm proud to be affiliated with an editor that stands by me when I make that assertion. If you suck, I'll tell you by telling the readers. Period. If I can't find redeeming qualities in the music I review, that gets printed. Making it in music was tough long before that American Idol fluff-fest came out - there are thousands of bands out there vying for attention, hoping for a good blurb from a publication to fatten their press kits. With so many bands and artists sendig in music, you better impress or I won't find time to make up nice things to say about you. Let me add this - when it comes to reviewing both signed and yet-to-be-signed releases there will always be more shit in the oysters than pearls. Think of every sucky original band you had to endure to see the one you came to see, multiply that high number by some number in the hundreds, now give them all 8 track recorders and CD burners, now give them Jersey Beat's address…that's a lot of shit. Just letting you know… Tapping the Vein's "Undone" is the biggest pearl I've found to date! Thee best and thee most promising demo I have heard in many years! The best songs, the best lyrics, the best group performance, and the best production. Thee best. The first song mood swings from dream to nightmare without losing momentum, then building toward and ultimately succumbing to the nightmare. "Wake me, I am beautiful…wake me, there must be some mistake…" Awesome! The jacket didn't specify who wrote the words but vocalist Heather Thompson delivers them well, she's as strong as she is distinct. Their lyrics come off as "cornered animal," beaten to the point where lashing out is at the top of a short list of options. The music is rich, well-layered-a perfect balance of guitar synth, crunch, bottom end, and beat. "Bleed" may be their most radio-friendly piece-I have no trouble seeing that one as a fan-maker-but my favorite was "The River." It starts quiet, with subtle bass work and a sneaky guitar line and then BOOM! "Look at me, I am nothing! But I need to reach you…" The music behind the chorus found a nice dark Home between sway and metal without losing its pop appeal-too cool! "Undone" is well-composed with razor sharp barbs on its hooks. I heard the demo and then caught them live twice, and I want to add that it is this humble critic's opinion that Tapping the Vein is the best band to come out of the Philly area in a long time. Break on through! - Mike Chant

TONIGHT WE ESCAPE (2 discs, neither titled) (www.tonightweescape.com, rocketentertainment@hotmail.com, quicklifedude@hotmail.com) Well, all right…a good modern punk band…tracks "Tune In, Turn On" and "Dating Can Be Deadly" stand out. The vocals are subtle and "not-on" in a way that's just right, swinging from rough-and-off to low-and-moody when called for. The drummer's got some old school Metallica and Guns and Roses in him, the guitars go for rawness and dissonance and hit the mark tastefully. Carry on… - Mike Chant

VALEZE – "Come Undone" (www.tvffanyrandol.com) You gotta be fucking kidding me! Val-cheese… Ever been too loaded at a bar hosting karoake night? You'd rather be there. It's lacking in that way, like maybe once these were okay songs but tonight…. The singer doesn't hurt my ears like a drunk chick bellowing "I will survive!" but she didn't grab me either. Sorry, not impressed. - Mike Chant

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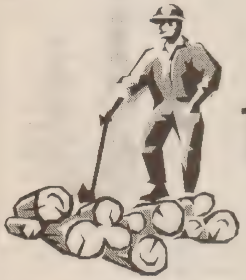
NADINE GOELLNER - *Remember My Name* (Go-Kart Records, P.O. Box 20 Prince Street Station, NYC, 10012.) Ten songs plus an acoustic version of "Only You." Just over 64 minutes. Quite a good album. Nadine wrote the songs and the lyrics with no capitalization, and sings and plays acoustic guitar. She shared production with some dude with the intriguing name of Plink Giglio. The easy way to review this album is to say that there are 11 songs performed in the vocal stylings of Mariah Carey and Toni Braxton. If you like listening to those ladies, you should enjoy listening to this lady as well. In case there are some readers who haven't heard either of those ladies, I can say: What? Primarily acoustic music with bass backup and various other instruments on some songs. Typical pop lyrics about love and lost love, as far as I can tell by listening. I refuse to read nything without capital letters. She has a nice voice; sings in a rather breathy style, sort of blues-based pop with some rock thrown in and a bit of reggae. Enjoyable to listen to for a dozen spins. Girl looks something like Amy Grant; in musical style and presentation and voice she reminds me strongly of Toni Braxton. Which may be as meaningless to most readers as a reference to SCREECHING WEASEL is to me. Recommended to folks who enjoy mainstream pop.



the leighton listen

by rodney leighton

SHIMMERPLANET - *Welcome To Shimmerplanet* (damned if I know, no address anywhere!) SHIMMERPLANET consists of Carolyn Eufrasio and John Fischer, a duo based in NYC who share many things musical. John did most of the writing and some of the singing. Carolyn has one hell of a voice and does much of the singing. John also plays some instruments. A diverse and eclectic mix of fun music. "Happy" goes "Close your eyes and count to 10; sing the song inside your head, if you're unhappy." Sung by John while Carolyn does la,la,la background vocals and someone provides alto operatic aria behind that. No indication if Carolyn did that or someone else. An unusually performed song which is very enjoyable. Album starts off with a pop tune sung by Carolyn which has the weirdest instrumentation, just that one-finger piano plucking that 6 year old kids do. I found it annoying; a strange choice of music for a good song. Followed by a straight up rock tune. "Radiant" is a pop/rock number with good vocals by Carolyn and spoken word bits by John. On "Beat Me," they go aboriginal, with tom—toms and chanting. "I Believe I'm Going Home" is a beautiful ballad sung really well by Carolyn with minimal background instrumentation. It's the best song on the CD. The promo sheet had someone compare this duo to THE EURYTHMICS. Well, they're lots better. I thoroughly enjoyed this entire album and will listen to it for some time to come. If they had stuck to a pop/rock style, I would have liked it even better.

JETT BRANDO – "*Jagged Junktion" EP* (Go-Kart Records) I'm damned if I know what to say about this 6 song CD. Seems to be a band although the info only mentions this one guy who is named Jeremy Winter. All the tunes are different, ranging from a terrible experimental noise computerized feedback thing to a gentle, laidback, pure pop sound, to experimental rock sounds. There are two very good tunes and two unbearable to me, with two in between. An eclectic, experimental mix. Full marks for trying something different and diverse. Personally, if all 6 tracks were like track #4 I would play this one quite awhile. As it is, the 8 times I listened to it are enough.

STEVE VON TILL - *If I Should Fall To The Field* (Neurot Recordings, PO Box 410209, San Francisco CA 94l41) Von Till has a very deep voice and sings his pop songs in a dull, plodding style with minimal background instrumentation and occasional backup vocals. Very, very acoustic. But it works well. The songs are all about back to earth, religion, native folks and beliefs and land and soil and stuff. The delivery seems rather boring and dull; however, there is a throbbing intensity to his voice and delivery which pulls you in and holds you in the palm of his hand until the song is completed. A unique cut is "The Harpy," a Robert Service poem recited by Von Till's grandfather Steve back in 1961, recorded on tape; Steve added some drone behind the words, which sound like a sermon given by a lay preacher in a tent somewhere. The traditional "Am I Born To Die," an old hymn, is done quite well. There's a good cover of Neil Young's "Running Dry," and a bunch of Von Till originals. A shade too slow and thick for me to want to listen to it again but I enjoyed the 8 or so plays it received and think you folks should try it out.

NINA MANKIN (Bingo World Records, P.O. Box 92227, Nashville TN 37209) An upcoming young lady who divides her time and talents between NYC and Nashville and gets assistance from tons of folks. Jill Sobule had something to do with this album, although there's no real indication of what, other than that she is hiding behind a mic for a group photo of the chorus for "Big Ol' World," a fairly cool sing—along pop type tune which concludes with a few verses by 3 year old Gabriel Nathanson (whose father is named Roy and if you don't know who he is, you don't care what he does.) Nina sounds a lot like Emmylou Harris on the songs that are countrified, and something like a young Linda Ronstadt when doing pop/rock songs. I shouldn't have to tell you any more. But I will. The album was mostly produced by Nina with some help from Casey Kelly; she wrote or co—wrote the songs; she sings damn well and she had about 20 people help out on this album. Given half a break, she will be a huge mainstream music star in a couple of years. Go buy a few copies of this CD and help her out. What, you want to know more about the music? Jeez. Hey, it's countrified rock or rock/pop with countrified undertones. Excellent singer. The guitars and drums and violins and harmonicas and keyboards and trombones are all well played. Very good album. Recommended.

SHERBY - 3 song EP (No address) Three lovely tunes sung in a delightful acoustic style in a beautiful, emotive voice. Seems to be a piano in the background; the only notable instrumentation. These songs lure the listener into paying close attention and hearing the stories, and even the guitar if one listens closely enough, and are the type of music which can play in my machine for hours. If this one were a 12 song release, I probably would let it run all day. An excellent demo. Contact Lisa Sommers at mailbu263l@yahoo.com

KELLY DOLAN – *Bedtime* Story (No Hands Records, P.O. Box 6031, Delray Beach, FL 33482 www.kellydolan.com) The full title of this release is, "The new musical thriller Bedtime Story, a postmodern nightmare, starring Kelly Dolan." An amazing aural adventure on CD, Ms. Dolan and Jason Graham composed 11 short stories about life, love and adventure; found a few talented folks and recorded these songs with Kelly as main songstress as well as playing half a dozen instruments. Jason plays some, and a couple of folks help out with violins, viola, trombone and other things. The whole thing is a sensory experience to delight the listener. "Angel" is easily the best, with operatic-like vocals, symphonic instrumentation, and a sense-surround surreal quality which drowns the listener in its delightful message and ambience. There are a couple of so-so tracks, but almost everything is good. Kelly ranges from basic acoustic pop to aria-quality crooning; I think she hits every note on the scale at least once. A great performance, well produced, recorded, mixed and mastered by Dolan and Graham. You owe it to yourselves o check this out.

DAVE ERIC - *The Fuse Is Lit* (www.daveeric.com) Seven songs written and produced by Dave. Fairly decent acoustic pop. I despise 2-sentence "reviews" but, what the hell can I say? NO information is provided; I have no idea if Dave is playing the guitar or drums or both. The songs are good but Jim has heard 88,000 songs exactly like them and I have heard a bunch; the guy sings okay but no better than the other 380 people I have heard sing these types of songs. Nothing bad; nothing to excite anyone.

LITTLE WINGS - *Light Green Leaves* (Box 7154, Olympia, WA 98507) Different in many ways, not the least of which is that this project is released on cassette, vinyl, and CD, with each format containing the same dozen songs done in different fashions. The CD version is allegedly the best; thank God, that's the one I have been enduring. Kyle Field produces a quirky, diverse album which requires a certain taste and some getting used to. Neil Young is at times marvelous; a real delight to listen to. At other times, he sucks. Kyle is similar. There are some great Young-ish tunes on here which are a delight to listen to. Then there is some damn-fool ditty that 6 year old kids might enjoy. I admit that Kyle's voice does not appeal to me. One track actually sounds like someone came to visit, sat down at the kitchen table, and spontaneously started to sing a song. Which would be fine and dandy, but I don't much like his voice; others may find it great. This is followed by a totally silly piece of shit. If I were the type of reviewer who writes off a release if the opening song is bad, this one would have gone into the box to give to someone at that point and ignored otherwise. However, being that I listen to every album at least once, I did so – and found some nuggets. There are a few cute tunes here and some real crap. Four spins later, it is now time to chuck I into the aforemetioned box. But at least it got a review of sorts.

ASK NORA - *Circling As Warmth* (Viridian Records, asknora@viridianrecords.com) This guy lives in the other end of Canada from where I was born and reared, and is still living in

Vancouver. He started fooling around with music at age 6; at age 20, he released this album on his own label. This one is certainly diverse. Starts off like straight up blues. Then things start happening. Plain old rock. Classical guitar. Punk Rock and even some Rawk. Nice gentle ballads; screaming ditties; long songs; short songs. A few days ago I was laid off; wondering how I am going to pay my mortgage? Song #4 is entitled "Are You Wormwood?" and begins "What's the use in worrying what you cannot control? What's the use in worrying at all?" Ah, how true. Lying on the bathroom floor screaming in pain from the cramps in my legs, I listened to the rest of this album in between bouts of pain. That particular song starts off with those 3 lines as a gentle ballad and then goes berserk, which seems to be a theme throughout. Soft music/ raucous music; soft music/ noise; soft music/ samples; soft music/ answering machine tape. Jeffery Mettlewsky, the dynamo behind this project, does almost everything: Writing songs, singing, playing eleven different instruments and painting parts of the booklet. While I would have preferred that he do a straight rock ballad type album, since those are very good, I admit that the experimental material certainly keeps the listener alert and makes for a diverse aural experience. It even caused me to use whatever is left of my brain; one song begins with an instrumental intro which I immediately recognized. Hmmm, where does that come from? Ah, an Alannah Myles song. Which one? Haven't remembered that yet. One is a guitar number I have heard classical guitarist Liona Boyd perform; he does it just as well. An intriguing release.

LISA RAHON - *This Is The Lisa Rahon Show* (www.alphababe.com) The liner notes have a photo of a babe in the shortest nun's habit in history. Unfortunately, that is the best part of the release. There are some good songs; when Ms. Rahon sings her original pop tunes as pop tunes, she sounds quite nice; the songs are good, although none would excite me greatly. But all are worthy of listening to a few times. However, she intersperses various experimental and noise elements between and into her songs, which turn off this listener. Admittedly, those factors might well be a delight to other people. Whoever receives this CD from me may love it to death. After 3 spins, I'm done with it.

GINA YOUNG *Intractable* (28 Days Records, 172 Fifth Ave. PMB #213, Brooklyn NY11217) Ah, the college chick has flown on her own with a delightful 15 song CD. When you buy a copy, your machine will tell you there are 16 tracks. #16 is about 3½ minutes of dead air followed by a few seconds of screaming. Gina would likely say: "Do I give a fuck?", which is part of the lyrics on one tune. A gay 21-year old gal who is proud of the fact; a punk rock chick who must spend hours creating that weird hairdo and also spends time writing songs about matters which concern gay punk gals - love, politics, lust, activism, life. Loves lost and found; destroying property in the name of so-called social activism; girls who aren't sure what their sexual preference is. With a couple of exceptions, all are done in a humorous manner while making the intended points. In "So-Called Str8 Grrrl," she sings: "If you think I am so crazy . . .how come I know how you taste?" There are a couple of slow acoustic numbers, quite nice. Couple of rockers. Various female folks help out on various instruments - Michelle Williams on bass; Tracy Dicktracy ; Kathi Ko. In one song, she sings about appearing on MTV: "I do lots of foolish things to pay the rent". There isn't a lyric sheet but most of the words are easily discernible; one song is something about a TV and a girlfriend and is the worst track on the album. Everything else is fun; amusing to listen to, and contains some strong messages if you listen to the lyrics. There's a considerable amount of strong language: if such things turn you off, avoid this album. Otherwise, go buy a bunch of copies.

THE ESKIMOS - *Something Must Be Transmitted Somehow* (Tell Me Later Records, P.O. Box 574, Athens, GA, 30603.) 17 tracks. Of which one is blank. One very good song, one not too bad, and 14 pieces of crap.

PURPOSE - *Songs At Ground Zero*($8 from Reaction Records, P.O. Box 362, Stockton, NJ 08559) Well, the notes on the liner state that the band is disbanded and that this record is demo quality at best. So, they are honest people. Yet they ask 8 bucks for a copy?? They say they believe these 7 tunes are the best songs they have ever written. Maybe so. It's straight ahead punk rawk which is not exactly my style and the singer, whoever he is, does not enunciate clearly enough for me to determine much of what he is singing, and there are no lyrics included. I did recently write that I sometimes like something a bit more raucous than the music Jersey Beat usually forwards to me; this one is a tad too raucous. Johnny Puke should have gotten this one. My best guess: it's quite good punk rock. I think the songs are about the events of Sept. 11, 2001, but I wouldn't swear to it. A good CD to pass around to friends but $8 is way overpriced.

ROBERT + KAREN - *Maximum Love Vibes* (P.O. Box 20189, El Sobrante, CA 94803) 5- song CD. One instrumental , which is actually the best thing on here. Experimental techno pop. Two complete spins are all I can handle. If you like experiinental, techno-influenced pop music, try this out.

SAINT ETIENNE- *Finisterre* (Mantra Recordings, 580 Broadway, #1004, NYC 10012) This is a Brit band comprised of two guys and Sarah Cracknell, a sweet voiced lady who croons the pop tunes in a delightful, earthy but nice girl voice. Plus assistance from Michael Jayston, who does bitty intros to each song in a Vincent Price like voice. There's also a guest appearance by Wildflower, who ruins one song with some hip hop rap, and 11 other people who do something (albeit I have no idea what, since none of the promo stuff tells me.) Perhaps I should have chucked it all in the trash like Al Crisafulli does with CD's he doesn't like. I suspect pop lovers will like this one; people who like pop with experimental instrumentation and modulations should really like it. The lady has a great voice. Songs are Ok. Check it out.

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The Quiet Corner

by al crisafulli

Nick Berry Photo by Steve Bumgarner

There used to be a guy....

His name was Nick Berry, and he's still a guy, but he used to be the singer for a great Jersey pop band called Dots Will Echo.

Actually, he's still the singer of Dots Will Echo, but people used to know who they were. They were the first rock band associated with the Windham Hill record label; their debut was released on the High Street imprint in 1991. My wife and I were in college at the time, and we fell in love with the record immediately, and played it incessantly for two or three years. It was one of *those* records.

Years later, we had the opportunity to meet, and befriend, Nick Berry. He's one of those ultra-nice guys who seems to know everyone; one of those guys who stays in touch with anyone he's ever met but never in an overbearing way. It seemed like it was only a matter of time before Dots Will Echo was rewarded with the kind of success you'd expect from a brilliant pop band.

Two weeks ago, my wife and I saw Nick Berry perform a solo acoustic show at a little coffee shop in my town. There were four people at the show, and two of them left after half an hour. The other two were my wife and I. This is a crime.

Nick Berry and Dots Will Echo are the kind of guys you *want* to succeed. You root for them. They're nice guys – family guys – guys who smile at you and remember your name and get excited when they talk about great pop songs but then get all bashful when you tell them how great their music is. "You think so?", they'd ask. Yeah, I think so.

And today, Nick Berry is still writing and performing music, in a shitty little coffee house in a dead town, because he still loves writing songs and he still loves playing. He questions when he's finally going to give up, but then he picks up his guitar and writes a brilliant pop song like "Tear These Buildings Down", which is the kind of song that sends you to another place for three minutes. I haven't seen Nick in years, and we walked up to him and talked with him like we just saw him the day before. We laughed and he played his music for us, and told us how he wrote and performed a song on Will Ackerman's last Grammy-nominated album, but wasn't having much luck getting people to come out to see his shows. He'd play a song and then ask us a question about our kids, talk to us for a few minutes, and then play another song. We put a $20 in the tip jar and considered it money well-spent, because we just saw one of our favorite songwriters and he played *just for us*.

We were lucky, and everybody else were idiots, because they stayed home and listened to Hole or Jane's Addiction or watched Fear Factor or whatever.

Nick Berry deserves to be a successful singer-songwriter, and the fact that he's not is further proof that we do not live in a perfect world.

If you book bands at a club, give Nick Berry a shot on a bill where some people will show up. If you go see bands that play pop songs, check out Nick Berry sometime. If you invest your hard-earned cash in records you've never heard before, pick up Dots Will Echo's self-titled CD and their self-released followup, *Get Your Hands Off My Modem, You Weasel*. You will not be disappointed, and a great artist will get some of the exposure he deserves.

I've never actually reviewed a record by a band with a clear Dave Matthews influence. That's why I'm having a hard time believing that **THE HIGH CANADIENS** actually *have* a Dave Matthews influence, which makes me feel better, because they're actually quite good. Five musicians playing lots of instruments with a mellow, down-home feel, their CD ***Empty Chairs; Festivity*** (Perhaps Transparent, www.perhapstransparent.com) suffers a bit from monotonous song structures with weak bridges, but offers clean harmonies and crisp production as compensation. The Dave Matthews thing sticks in my craw a bit – especially on the four tracks featuring guest violinist Claudia Chopek – but still a worthwhile release from yet another promising band from New Jersey.

At the same time, **TANDY** have honed their alt-country roots pop thing to a fine point, blending well-constructed vocal melodies with the same instrumentation featured on the High Canadiens CD (acoustic guitar, harmonica, accordion, pedal steel, and the other usual suspects of country instruments). Their CD ***The Lowdown, 1997-2002*** is, apparently, a collection of Tandy tracks (on an enhanced CD, no less) from the past several years. The key difference between Tandy and the Canadiens, of course, is song development. The Canadiens spend time creating a mood, while Tandy dive right into the song – the result is a greater sense of polish and maturity (Gammon, www.gammonrecords.com).

And yet it gets better. **JAMES LUTHER DICKINSON**, who's resume reads like a rock encyclopedia (played piano on the Rolling Stones' "Wild Horses", produced the Replacements' *Pleased to Meet Me*) simply slides effortlessly around the piano, blending blues and rag and soul and southern rock in a way that Little Feat only wish they could have. A voice that sounds as if he gargles gravel with whiskey each morning. A subtle slide guitar. A simple '50s rock ballad with gospel-tinged backup vocals. A brilliant record, called ***Free Beer Tomorrow*** (Artemis Records, www.artemisrecords.com).

The **REVEREND VINCE ANDERSON** calls his brand of music "dirty gospel". Yep, that's about it. Even more gravelly than Jim Dickinson above, Anderson's CD ***The 13th Apostle*** (Dirty Gospel, www.reverendvince.com) is Rocky Horror in a revival tent, Mojo Nixon meets Tom Waits, the soundtrack to some fucked-up hallucination I had once at an amusement park.

Did you know that **MICHAEL J SHEEHY** is just off a highly successful National US tour with Peter Murphy? That's what the one-sheet that came with his CD, ***No Longer My Concern*** (Beggars Banquet, www.beggars.com) says. It also reminds me that Peter Murphy is ex-Bauhaus. Also mentions this CD should be filed under "Rock". Oddly enough, nobody has given a shit about Peter Murphy since 1991, and I haven't heard anyone talking about his highly successful tour, haven't seen him on TRL, and don't know what any of that has to do with this really, really bad CD. I just threw the CD in the trash, and therefore, it is No Longer My Concern.

Power Pop. Boy, has it gotten bland. The cover of **ALEX WOODARD**'s CD *Saturn Returns* (www.alexwoodard.com) boasts members of the Posies, Gigolo Aunts, Fountains of Wayne, Ivy, and Sunny Day Real Estate, and doesn't sound like *any* of those bands. Instead, it sounds like generic video game pop, the kind of thing you'd hear on one of the "radio stations" while playing Grand Theft Auto. After the song was over, the DJ would come on and say something like "You're listening to Lame Radio, where we play nothing but warmed-over movie soundtrack anthems from predictable films about race cars and airplanes and the pursuit of glory, in an effort to let you forget about how pathetic your lame life really is."

"Courting Another's Muse", the lead track from **JASON MORPHEW**'s ***The Duke of Arkansas***, has this big, wow-wow analog synth bass thing in the background, while the music meanders off in a haze of distortion and fuzzy vocals. This paves the way for "Sex", a pop song with cutesy backing vocals and driving bass guitar. Essentially, this is a record full of new wave pop hooks stuck together with hope – the hope that eventually there will be a song that's more than just a promising pop song and is actually something worth listening to all the way through. Unfortunately, it never fulfills its promise (www.badabingrecords.com).

I've been waiting two years for a record as good as Elliot Smith's *Figure 8*. Unfortunately, nothing has touched me the same folksy, Beatlesque way that record did. **MARK McADAM**'s new CD, *Boy Wonder*, however, comes close, in that it sounds *exactly* like Smith. Songs on *Boy Wonder* recall songs from *Figure 8* in a scary way, as if I walked into some *Bizarro* world where Smith's CD wasn't ever released – except I know there is no bizarro world, and Smith's CD *was* released. Problem is, as much as I'd like to bash McAdam for being derivative, the CD is actually very good. Peppered with cello, odd percussion, and well-written lyrics, there's a bit of Tom Waits in here to make things interesting beyond the underlying current of plain acoustic music that pervades the CD. And just when the brilliance of "The Rouxs" comes to a sputtering, record-scratching end, we're treated to the simplicity of "Skin Thick Skin", where McAdam sings "I'm not quite ready to face another one of these times", against a sparse acoustic guitar and percussion. McAdam sounds like Paul Simon on this track. This is an unbelievably pleasing record, full of all sorts of surprises (www.marcmcadam.com).

Fear of Falling was an old New Jersey band that was fairly popular that I never really liked much. **KIMON** was their singer, and his new CD *Your Lucky Day* picks up right where FoF left off. This is sort of an Everlast ripoff; suffering through yet another September 11-related song is painful (when it asks me how I would feel if a thousand tons of steel were crumbling around me, I can't help but say "Well, I don't really know. Probably scared?"). A reviewer pulled out in their bio says that Kimon is like Lou Reed meets Billy Idol while hanging out with Steely Dan. Well, no. It's not like that at all. It's more like Richard Marx meets Billy Vera while hanging out with Frankie & the Knockouts. And I don't mean that as a good thing (Ultrascene Entertainment, www.ultrascene.com). Oh, yeah, they sent a "special edition video CD", too. Fuck Macintosh. They're making it way too easy.

DARBY JONES

DARBY JONES play emo. I like emo. Their three-song EP "**Harmony and Dischord**" sounds like Jimmy Eat World. I don't know if that's good or bad, since I like Jimmy Eat World but so does Carson Daly. Fuck, I'm so confused. Am I a geek? I don't want to be a geek (www.darbyjones.com).

Speaking of emo, **OWEN** is brilliant. Owen is Mike Kinsella, formerly of two great bands (American Football and Cap'n Jazz). Recorded in his home studio, his self-titled debut is an amalgamation of acoustic emo and offbeat, quirky acoustic rock. One beautiful song after another, this album reaches the heights hinted at by people like Dashboard Confessional and takes it two or three steps further (Polyvinyl Record Co, www.polyvinylrecords.com).

Speaking of Macintosh, virtually every CD that I have popped into my computer (I listen to CDs on the computer as I'm reviewing them) has done *something*. Either RealAudio pops up and gives me a track list, or I get railroaded into some website I don't want to visit, or, in the case of **DOLOUR**'s CD ***Suburbiac*** (Fugitive Recordings, www.fugitiverecordings.com), I am politely informed that I am using an Enhanced CD, just prior to when it hijacks my computer and sends me to a 17-inch image of someone's right eye. Just when I'm about to tear the fucking CD out of my computer, "Menage" kicks in – a fairly hard-rocking dose of power pop – and I decide to hang around for a track or two (after, of course, pointing my cursor at the eye and jabbing the eyeball a few times). Dolour sound like an indie rock band, like a well-produced, arena-rock version of Guided By Voices. The bio makes reference to Dolour's "current lineup", which essentially means that the band consists of Shane Tutmarc and his revolving cast of characters, but that's fine, because Tutmarc's vision is something I want to hear. By the time I get to "Iceland", which sounds like Reggie & the Full Effect, I'm sold.

Shane, a word of advice – kill the Enhanced CDs. Your music stands well on its own.

MUSIC
SCHEDULE
CHILDREN'S

SCOTT E. MOORE has been making music in New Jersey for years; I recall seeing his name on various demos and local compilations ten years ago. His latest CD, ***Mr. Misunderstood***, is an achievement – as an "adult" record, the melodies, phrasings, and instrumentation fit the lite-rock mold. As a "singer-songwriter" record, Moore blends his mellow vocal phrasings with just enough soulful, funky flavor to keep the listener interested. Moore can write a song – perhaps his status as Renaissance Man (he's also a TV producer/director, and promoter of the long-running "Writer's Hang" concert series) has kept him from reaching greater heights. Moore's songs are better than 90% of the similar stuff out there, and I'd like to see this CD help vault him to the level of success that such a hardworking guy deserves (Wingtip Productions, www.wingtip.net).

Right off the bat, the liner notes for **NATE RUTH**'s ***Whatever It Meant*** thanks someone named Danielle Crisafulli. No relation. Never heard of her. Got to say that up front, because I'm going to give this a good review. RUTH has so many ideas, he's frantically trying to get them into each song, and I love that. Each song is a wash of sound, distorted guitars mesh with brilliantly programmed electronic drums and hushed vocals and *strings*. Things quiet down and speed up unpredictably, hooks are buried behind hooks, each song has two or three parts layered on top of one another. It's almost as if each song is *several* songs, all playing at the same time, the audio equivalent of Bloomberg Television, with different things to listen to depending on where your ears and your brain take you. It's no wonder, then, that the reviews in the bio reference a hundred different artists as comparisons. You may hear Brian Wilson, but you're just as likely to hear Kraftwerk or the Flaming Lips or Ministry. This music is *crazy*. (soundless records, www.soundlessrecords.com). I love it.

The lead track from **FIZZLE LIKE A FLOOD**'s ***Flash Paper Queen***, "Like Wind Like Rain", is an absolute masterpiece of pop brilliance that music fans are lucky enough to encounter once or twice a decade. Really. It's that good.

Fizzle is Doug Kabourek, a prolific songwriter and home recording aficionado from Omaha, where the hip kids apparently have nothing better to do than refine their craft to the point where they rival some of the greatest pop genius this country has produced – Brian Wilson, Alex Chilton, Lou Barlow, Uncle Floyd. It's easy to compare Kabourek to Guided by Voices because 10 of 11 tracks on this CD are low-fi, home-recorded pieces, but he's much more than that. Kabourek isn't some indie rock flavor of the month, he's the genuine article, writing complex melodies and emotional (not "emo", mind you) pop. This is a great CD. And "Like Wind Like Rain" is just a perfect pop song.

Since September 11, I've had to patiently endure the tributes of dozens of local musicians and singer-songwriters, sloughing them off with a "thought that counts, music sucks" sort of mentality, waiting for it to all go away. It's not going away.

That said, **MIKE "SPORT" MURPHY** has managed to pull it off – not a September 11 tribute, but a brilliant album of songs – dedicated to a man named Peter Vega. Mr. Vega was Murphy's nephew, a Brooklyn firefighter who was killed in the line of duty, saving lives on that shitty, shitty day. Sometimes it's actually possible to forget that there were 3000 individual people who died that day, not just a big number but actual *people*, and Murphy managed to remind me of that painful fact.

Murphy's music is such a departure from the typical three-chord folkie pablum, he writes songs – REAL songs with rough edges and odd rhythms and a million tracks of unorthodox instruments and arrangements. Each song is more ambitious than the last, and he's not afraid to make a little noise in the process. I hope Murphy realizes that his tribute is a wonderful gift. The name of the CD is *Uncle* and the label is Kill Rock Stars .

And while Mike Murphy is dynamic and takes risks, **DAVE MURPHY** is just so, so plain. ***Chasing Ghosts*** is the name of the album, if you care, and it's done by Phoenix Night Promotions (www.murphyworld.com). If you've got $20, and you're only going to buy a CD by someone named Murphy, by Sport's, not Dave's.

Sometimes when people suck, they try and pass themselves off as avant-garde. I could take a big pile of horseshit, put some frosting on it and make it look just like a birthday cake. But when you take a bite, you'll know it's not a cake, it's horseshit (**THOMAS TRUAX**, ***Full Moon Over Wowtown***, Psycho Teddy Records, www.psychoteddy.com).

LANKY has compiled "nine songs of personal reflection". Welcome to my hell. I just got done reviewing four pages of people's personal reflection. Sheeit (**inner onwriter**, Impostor Records, no address but it doesn't really matter).

CREEPER LAGOON were one of my absolute favorite bands – from their debut 7-inch on Ratfish Records to their last full-length as a band on Dreamworks, they created some of the most incredible, post-Pavement (is Pavement gone yet?), studio-treated indie rock I've heard in a long, long time. After their last CD, *Take Back Tomorrow and Give Me Yesterday*, I waited patiently for news of their next release. Unfortunately, Creeper dissolved as a band, leaving Sharky Laguana to carry on the Creeper name with a cast of friends and associates on their latest EP "**Remember the Future**" (Arena Rock Recording Company, one of the greatest little labels around, www.arenarockrecordingco.com). Laguana remains an excellent songwriter, but he's had to go the "quiet" route on this CD, which is a stark contrast to the powerful noise pop to which I've grown accustomed. Muted vocals and subdued pianos and acoustic guitars are scattered about, backed by drum machine and lots of reverb. While it's nice to hear Creeper still making a go of it, and while this is certainly a collection of five strong songs, the loud stuff was far, far better.

AVAIL – *Front Porch Stories* (Fat Wreck Chords) Now a brand-name in heartfelt hardcore, Avail has only benefitted from age and bigger recording budgets. *Front Porch Stories* has a great sound – leaps and bounds over any of the band's Lookout! material, which blended bass and guitars into mush. While still a punk record, this release shows a band showing off their chops in other genres, including folk and Southern Rock ("West Wye.") I'll admit I didn't "get" this band for many years and still find the whole Bosstones-esque idea of having a dancing boy in the band completely extraneous. But no one can deny the band's work ethic and dedication to the scene, as well as making a decent new album. They are no longer the uncontested best at what they do (they'll never be Hot Water Music,) but you've to tip your hat to Avail.

BILLY SYNDROME – *Between* (Slutfish Records, 327 Bedford Ave #A2, Brooklyn NY 11211) Although I found this poorly recorded, mostlly tuneless effort by Anti-Folk superstar Billy Syndrome to be underwhelming, it does feature drums by Uncle Wiggly's James Kavoussi (I miss that guy!) and fellow Anti-Folk vet Roger Manning guests on guitar.

BOOKS LIE – *Weep* (Coalition Records/Ebullition) Books Lie are a NYC-area uncompromising screamy hardcore band that bring to mind the once-vibrant scene for this kind of stuff around ABC No Rio in the early 90's. It's interesting how Books Lie put the new millennium twist on things though, with odd digital noises added over songs ("The Call It Criminal") or the odd short blast of instrumental (traditional and digital) mayhem thrown in through these 13 cuts. While there is hardly enough melody or vocal hooks here to make this memorable for me, one can hear the sincerity dripping from each track and that's saying something these days. Nice-ass paper too on the extensive B&W CD booklet. Noisy hardcore kids take note.

BUZZKING – *I Shave My Pussy* (www.buzzking.com) Clever, stream-of-consciousness songs set to jazzy rock riffs from a full four-piece band fronted by an actual dude named Buzz King. My favorite song, "This Morning," begins with Buzz ruminating on why anal sex is so "in" these days, and before you know it, he hypothesizes that perhaps if we allowed priests to "get laid," they might keep their hands off the altar boys. Likewise, "Oasis Blows" is a witty comparison of said UK band against the merits of Radiohead. Funny, charming, and surprisingly musical for a CD with a big naked chick on the cover.

CALIFORNIA SPEEDBAG – *The Fire Of Misery* (Smog Veil Records, 316 California Ave. #207, Reno NV 89509) Having just seen Drag The River, my threshold for punk dudes playing alt-country was pretty high, as those guys do it with such style and sincerity. Another group of aging punk dudes doing the alt-country thing is Cleveland's California Speedbag, vets of the pre-1980 Ohio scene. Some of these guys were in a band called The Kneecappers, remembered by few except the old, old school. While these 12 songs are full-on country with accordion, slide guitar, etc., it lacks depth and is rife with whiskey cliches and songwriting that's insulting to the memory of true country artists like George Jones or Hank Williams. Go buy a Drag The River CD instead.

COUNTERFIT – *Super Amusement Machine For Your Exiting Heart* (Negative Progression) Technical yet two-dimensional emo-pop with smooth vocals and lots of harmonies. I suppose one would call this indie-punk but it is musician's music, with lots of tricky stops and starts. And although Counterfit possesses pop elements, they fail to use them to come up with a memorable song. I listened to all 10 songs here and couldn't hum you a piece of any one of them, let alone remember one phrase of the disposable personal lyrics. My girlfriend will probably love this but I expect more.

JEFF DAHL – *Street Fighting Reptile* (Steel Cage, PO Box 29247, Philadelphia PA 19125) Jeff Dahl is a punk rock lifer, who trudges on in relative obscurity releasing album after album (some better than others) for all the right reasons. I'd venture to say its been 15 or 20 years since he's made any money to speak of from music (he did two years in the Angry Samoans), but he keeps self-producing and releasing records regardless of current punk trends or Soundscan figures, and that's rebellious and righteous all at the same time. With *Street Fighting Reptile,* Dahl has finally hooked up with Steel Cage Records, a label with a rockin' reputation and better distribution than Dahl has had for years. The 10 songs here are generally old, old school pre-hardcore punk. Think glam punk like the New York Dolls, Heartbreakers, etc. and you'll get the idea. There's a couple of slower songs as well but basically it's butt-shakin' rock, with female backups throughout. If you remember either of Dahl's old L.A. bands (Powertip and Vox Pop,) and you're old enough to have seen them play, then you're 40, dude!

DIGGER – *Keystone* (Hopeless) As its members grow more mature, so does Digger's sound, as evidenced on this new full-length. Digger's guitar sound is more angular, indie-rock influenced, as opposed to the formulaic pop-punk of previous efforts. There's still lots of rich harmonies and lovelorn lyrics, as one has come to expect. But this is definitely an improvement.

DYNAMITE BOY – "Devoted" EP (Offtime Records, PO Box 479176, Chicago IL 60647) I've seen this band pull off a decent set of punk rock in a live setting, and it's to their credit that they've been around a while and paid a lot of dues. However. The first song here, "Utah," is an upbeat pop-punk number and the second song is a cover of an old Big Boys tune from the 80's. It's admirable that a new-school pop-punk band would show off their knowledge of Texas punk history by choosing to cover the Big Boys. But then you get to the fourth song, a cover of Simple Mind's "Don't You Forget About Me." What are they trying to tell us? This thing clocks in at over four and a half minutes and morphs into a cover of The Cult's "Fire Women." By the end of that exhausting ordeal, the listener is left drained. When 33% of an entire CD is devoted to such banality – and then throw in the pedestrian songcraft of the title track – this EP comes off as underwhelming if not downright insulting.

EMOK – *Crumbs* (www.emok.net) Screamy, dropped-D tuning Israeli skronk-metal sung in English. While the six songs here are good, I wouldn't exactly go to war with Iraq just to protect Emok (especially since the band itself left Israel for NYC to escape serving in the army there.) Some of these songs have a cool early 90's flair (back when Sub Pop ruled) and Emok displays a lot of influences from bands like Soundgarden, Unsane, and Afghan Whigs. Where they fuck it all up is about every other song, when the singer falls into his Rage Against The Machine white-guy rap shtick that really distracts from the impressive tornado of noise that the other guys are whipping up.

G-WHIZ – *The Pop Punk Singles Collection 1989-2002* (Boss Tuneage) I suspect that the pool of potential buyers of this singles collection probably doesn't go far beyond the band's girlfriends and a small circle of friends around their Phoenix-area home. The music here is complete All/Descendents (or Big Drill Car to be more exact) styled punk, but entirely unoriginal and derivating. More ingratiating is the thin voice and retarded melodic sense of Ed Richards, who misses every opportunity afforded him by his competent if uninspired bandmates to turn these songs into something other than embarrassing. Of course, a band that has been playing like this since 1989 probably doesn't have much shame. Pity.

Johnny Puke Says So

HOT WATER MUSIC – *Caution* (Epitaph) I have long told anyone who'd care to listen that I firmly believe Hot Water Music is more of a cult than a band. With each new release, I long to become a member. While *Caution* is certainly HWM's most accessible album to date, none of the band's hallmarks (amazing rhythm section, dual gruff vocals, and ringing double guitar attack) suffer for it. In a just world, a song like "Trusty Chords" would be a Jimmy Eat World-like breakout single for a band that's long been punk's best kept secret. While many songs here are slower to mid-tempo and emo-tinged like the songs that populated HWM's previous release, *A Flight And A Crash,* all-out rockers like "Remedy" and "Wayfarer" almost booked the album's dozen songs with the fire of the band's legendary live sets. It's no small feat to have lasted as long as this band has in the relatively thankless punk underground and still have the chops to release relevant, meaningful music year after year. If rock 'n'roll is the new religion, Hot Water Music are its monks. Drunken, smelly monks, but monks nonetheless.

THE SET UP - *...And We Call It Decay* (Action Driver, PO Box 610, Toledo OH 43697) Strong, mid-tempo hardcore with the strangest mix that favors the loud, pounding drums over everything else and buries the chaotic, screamy vocals. Six songs total with cool titles like "Schindler's Lisp" and "Big Ups To Babylon." Good songs, weird production.

THE SMOKING POPES – *The Party's Over* (Double Zero, PO Box 7122, Algonquin IL 60102) One could write a book on how not to run your band based on the sordid history of Chicago's Smoking Popes. As the biggest fish in a small pond that was the Windy City's punk scene, the Popes made every mistake in the book – not the least of which was signing to Capitol Records before anyone outside of Cook County had any idea who they were. Add to that the four members' diminutive personalities, which hardly generated any buzz or hype, as well as the band's unwillingness to sacrifice their personal comfort in pursuit of the prerequisite grassroots touring, and you begin to get an idea of the forces at work against these talented underdogs. Ultimately it wasn't the obvious obstacles that led to their undoing but the conversion of band leader Josh Caterer to a form of charismatic Christianity that tore the vulnerable and sensitive crooner between the secular and the spiritual, and led him to abandon what he, his brothers, and drummer Mike Felumlee spent seven or eight years building. *The Party's Over* was the band's second full-length, recorded for Capitol, a label that was indifferent to the band and totally underwhelmed by the sales of of 1997's *Destination Failure* album. The band was unceremoniously dropped and *The Party's Over*, which was recorded in 1998, sat on the shelf for years. Now drummer Felumlee has released the album on his own Double Zero Records. As much as I love the Popes, I have to tell you that if *Destination Failure* had not fulfilled the destiny of its title, *The Party's Over* would have absolutely ended the band's party on Capitol's tab. To ask a major label that had yet to break a band to get behind the sophomore release that was all covers – and of songs that would only be familiar to the Popes' fans' grandparents – is ridiculous. File this under "What were they thinking?" as *The Party's Over* is a short ten songs with covers of Patsy Cline, Willie Nelson, The Byrds, and even Liza Fucking Minelli. Of course, unless you were a music freak or really old (I'm guilty on both counts), you'd never know these were even covers, since the shoddy packaging here contains no songwriting credits. The band members aren't listed, there's no mention that this was the band's last album, there's no photo of the group... there's really no excuse for Felumless to package his band's last will and testament in such a careless manner. When all is said and done, The Popes were an excellent and unique band with a great interplay between Josh's heavenly voice and the band's tight but remarkably restrained musicianship. Yes, *The Party's Over* indeed, but this feels like the kind of party where you barfed at the end of the night – a lousy ending to a good time.

SWINGIN' UTTERS - *Dead Flowers, Bottles, Bluegrass & Bones* (Fat Wreck Chords) Wow! I guess now that we've got Flogging Mollies and Real McKenzies all over the place, the Swingin' Utters may have decided they are from San Francisco again (it's a whole 3 songs into this full-length before the fake Irish accents and Pogues licks kick in.) The good news is there are more punk songs here than any record they've done since 1996's *A Juvenile Product Of The Working Class*. The most welcome change over previous Utters full-lengths is "If You Want Me To," which is a rare Utters acoustic track in that it isn't all mucked up with accordions and penny whistles, but most importantly employs the vocals of bassist Spike Slawson, the band's most untapped natural resource (and lead vox for Me First & The Gimmie Gimmies.) The band wraps up this disc with a psychedelic ballad called "Shadows & Lies" with an excess of strings and even a xylophone, which is really fuckin' odd for a band that still uses the term "street punk" with a straight face.

THE VANDALS - *Internet Dating Superstuds* (Kung Fu, PO Box 38009, Hollywood CA 90038) Catchy funny pop-punk from these well-traveled Cali Warped Tour types. Sophomoric, poignant, and unique by turns, sometimes offbeat and hilarious as well ("The Unseen Tears Of the Albacore,") all the songs are catchy but still fast and essentially punk. Lots of rich harmonies and more complicated song structures (and improving musicianship) make these 14 songs much more memorable than most jokey punk bands. I can't wait to plug this into a computer too, because the title refers to a real "Date-A-Vandal" game, the results of which are detailed in the enhanced portion of the CD. This is the best album overall from the Vandals since the original Vandals did *When In Rome, Do As The Vandals* and their classic "Peace Through Vandalism" EP.

WORMBELLY – *The Guf* (www.wormbelly.com) This Charleston, SC-based act has come a long way from a few years ago, when they were wig-wearing funky frat-boy fodder. These days, Wormbelly has refined their sound and eschewed silly gimmicks to become a complicated radio-ready rock band with great production, harmonies, and cool Radiohead-esque psychedelic interludes. Although Hootie is still an unwelcome presence in South Carolina's musical landscape, Wormbelly are the most likely to succeed band at the moment. Good for you, guys!

ZEKE – *Live & Uncensored* (Dead Teenager, Box 470153, San Francisco CA 94147) While Zeke were a band with metal-style licks and leads, they played so fast that these songs were unquestionably punk... so fucking punk that you feel dirty just listening to them. *Live & Uncensored* offers more than the title might suggest, including eight unreleased studio tracks, half of which were produced by the mighty Bill Stevenson. Following that stuff is an onslaught of 27 live tracks, all of varying sound quality. The best sounding of the live songs were recorded during a tour stint the band did with Pearl Jam. Although it's hard to imagine a band more out of their element, these tracks are the proof, complete with tens of thousands of fans actualy applauding and perhaps the oddest Zeke moment ever, when Marky addresses the crowd with, "Wait, one more song, the Wallflowers are up next!" I am such a huge fan of this regrettably defunct band that even crappy quality live songs increase my heart rate. Even through the thickest of mud of an audience-Walkman recorded song, the leads of Blind Marky Felchtone are clear, tight, and awe-inspiring.

COMPILATIONS

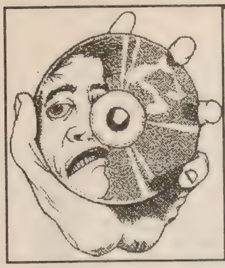
4 OLD TOXIC SHOCK EP'S – '83-'84 (Dr. Strange Records, PO Box 1058, Alta Loma CA 90701) In 1983 and '84, I was in high school and my folks gave me $2.50 each day for lunch. School food wasn't any good anyway almost every 7-inch advertised in *Maximum Rock N Roll* was eactly $2.50, including postage. Twenty years later, I still have my "Noise From Nowhere" compilation 7-inch as well as the Peace Corpse 7-inch, both of which are included on this CD comp. "Noise From Nowhere" featured four bands – Kent State, Modern Industry, Moslem Birth, and Manson Youth – and was the first release from the upstart Pomona, CA-based label Toxic Shock. The label's next release was label founder Bill Sassenberger's own band Peace Corpse, delivering six songs on a 7-inch EP called "Quincy," after the Jack Klugman TV show that had disparaged the L.A. punk scene with a particularly salacious episode. The next Toxic Shock 7-inch included on this comp is a 4-song EP called "Kelp and Salal" from Canada's Red Tide. While these three EP's have a certain historic value, they haven't aged that well and are considerably less engaging than when I was 17. The last 7-inch compiled here, however, is still pretty rockin' – that being Salt Lake City's Massacre Guys' EP, "Behind The 8 Ball." The Massacre Guys had a young Karl Alvarez in the band who would later gain a little more renown as Bassmaster General in the two bands called The Descendents and All. Twenty years later, you'd never know that from this reissue, since the liner notes don't tell you anything about the bands.

1157 WHEELER AVENUE – A Memorial To Amadou Diallo (Redline, 5420 S. Bishop, Chicago IL 60609) I really don't want to totally pan something that's for a good cause ($3 from each CD goes to Human Rights Watch,) but this is pretty awful. Most of the 14 tracks here are unreleased or live, but all the live stuff sounds awful with the possible exception of the Squirtgun cut. Some of the bands here never could play to being with, like Fifteen and J Church, and even the previously unreleased stuff is bad. When Shawn Stern from Youth Brigade starts into his Caucasian and rhythmless rap on "Men In Blue," one almost wants to jab sticks in his ears to block it out. God bless the well-meaning people who put out this charity CD, I'm sure they were well-intentioned. I also suspect they may be deaf.

BARRICADED SUSPECTS (Dr. Strange) Not exactly an 80's classic like *Flex Your Head* or *This Is Boston, Not L.A.*, *Barricaded Suspects* was the first LP on Toxic Shock. I don't want to spend too much time talking about the 18-song compilation itself because with the exception of the Mad Parade cut, the music is pretty forgettable – plus I couldn't sell my original, mint-condition vinyl LP on Ebay last year for $8, so how classic can it be? What's most interesting here is looking through the booklet (use a magnifying glass) and noticing how many band members on a fairly generic comp from 1984 are still active. Suburban Mutilation featured a much younger Rev. Norb (Boris The Sprinkler), Roach Motel's guitarist George Tabb still writes for MRR and plays in bands, and Massacre Guys' Karl Alvarez plays in ALL and The Descendents. If Dr. Strange is going to keep re-releasing old Toxic Shock stuff, it would be great to see some of their more crucial punk stuff resurface, like Italy's Raw Power or Th'Inbred. Even better would be to see re-release of Toxic Shock's alter-ego Fartblossom Enterprises, which used to sell great live tapes of bands like Fear, Black Flag, and the Circle Jerks, and even put out some vinyl, like the sought-after Justice League 7-inch and a band called Dain Bramage which featured a kid named Dave Grohl.

SMOKING POPES TRIBUTE (Double Zero, PO Box 7122, Algonquin IL 60102) Thirteen bands interpret the melodic pop songs of this defunct Chicago band. Unfortunately there are only about three bands anyone would have heard of to recommend here (Grade, Bad Astronaut, and The Ataris)000. Being a big fan of the Popes myself, I dug something about every track here, but to anyone unfamiliar with the band, you'll find little here to entice you. Hardcore Popes fans will want this for the Duvall cut along, which features all the former members of the Smoking Popes save one. Any form of liner notes or band info would have been nice too; this packaging sucks.

WE DON'T NEED SOCIETY – D.R.I. Tribute (Malt Soda Recordings, PO Box 7611, Chandler AZ 85246) I know, your first thought may be that the world has truly run out of bands to do tribute albums of. But to anyone around in hardcore during the 80's, DRI holds many fond memories. I booked a show for these guys in '84 or '85 and their drummer Felix gave me my first Mescaline, which stayed with me for days after the band had split town. Not only are DRI party-related stories a thing of punk legend, but their influence really began the crossover movement of the late 80's, combining hardcore and metal which, for good or bad, was a major force in punk for a while. Thankfully, this CD contains covers of only the best DRI songs, and none of their late-period pure metal stuff. All the songs you remember (if you're old enough) are here by mostly unknown bands doing relatively faithful renditions of the originals. Listening to some of these songs took me back – "Argument Then War," "Couch Slouch," "Madman" and "Five Year Plan" to name a few. Mind you, with 37 songs and just as many bands, this CD can become a droning yap fest when taken all at once. But in small doses, this is a joyous metal-tinged hardcore thrash down memory lane. Names you might recognize here are Ratos DePorao, the Fartz, Mr Bungle, and Electric Frankenstein. Good packaging makes this a must have for anyone for whom the word "thrash" ever had any meaning.



jersey beat reviews

5IVE's CONTINUUM RESEACH PROJECT - *The Hemophiliac Dream* (Tortuga Records, PO Box 15608, Boston, MA 02215) I could not love this more; absolutely magnificent! The 5ive's Continuum Research Project provides the same power anthem twice, once remastered by James Plotkin. If you are part of the select audience that gravitates towards this style, 5ive's Continuum Research Project provides you with a combination of atmospheric schizophrenia and experimental beauty. "The Hemophiliac Dream" moves gracefully from hauntingly eerie to moments of lush serenity. Approximately seven and half minutes into this work of brilliance, the guys ratchet up the intensity level and musical density, pummeling the listener with a mind numbing bassline that is interspersed with moments of other wordly ethereal grace. The bottom line here is that this track is mercilessly heavy and unlike some of the more unabashed noise of acts like Merzbow or Lightning Bolt, the 5ives seem to have a more defined idea of where their insanity should go. Plotkin thrashes his remix of the track, mangling some of its beauty and generating a new vision of this magnetic effort. This must be heard; this is simply amazing. The world is not ready for this, but the 5ives Continuum Research Project proves how the real genius lies below the radar of the mainstream. - Rich Quinlan

30 DAY WARRANTY - *Together We Stand* (PO Box 25248, Richmond VA 23260) Bland, boring, middle-of-the-road, melodic punk rock. I give these kids points for trying but there's nothing really separating them from the other two million bands out there who sound exactly like them. Egnh. - Oliver Lyons

ABILENE - *Two Guns, Twin Arrows* (54 40 or Fight Records, PO Box 1601, Acme, MI 49610-1601) Having missed both of Abilene's early releases, I had expectations when I popped this one into my stereo. Upon first listen, I was taken by the strong drumming, intense vocals, abrasive guitar and off-kilter time construction of *Two Guns, Twin Arrows* . However, I kept hearing something that seemed so out of place that it was brilliant; could that really be trumpet? Fred Erskine "f's playing is stirring and warm, adding a level and depth to this music that very few other acts possess. It is difficult to hear the furious vocal delivery of Alexander Dunham be seamlessly followed by jazz-style trumpet and not be taken aback; yet the more I listened, the more I loved this. "Blanc Fixe" is a wondrous melding of two very different styles, as drummer Scott Adamson churns out a clinic in percussion while Erskine's horn work adds a lounge sensibility to what is ultimately vividly experimental rock with haunting lyrics. On paper, Abilene sounds like a potential musical train-wreck, but the band brilliantly alters the serene and the aggressive, creating a myriad of moods along the way, such as the disjointed guitar playing that scars the otherwise lush intro of "Fitch" or the headspace ambiance of "Ghost Writer" that is quickly forgotten when the voluminous "Fellini" hits your ears. The dichotomy of Dunham's vocals and Erskine's soothing horn make this either frustrating or staggering, and I lean toward the latter. Abilene is not rewriting the book of indie rock, but they are adding a new chapter. Ultimately, the loud/quiet dynamic of "Phase Four" were more to my liking over the more subdued "Apache Country" or "Solidarity," but this is truly without competition in terms of providing a fresh take on how far rock can be pushed. - Rich Quinlan

THE ACEHOLES – *Split* (www.theaceholes.com) These punk-rock wiseasses from the deepest boondocks of New Jersey had a good idea – this is a Split CD with… themselves, the first half being newer material recorded with the current 4-piece lineup, and the second half with an earlier lineup as a trio. The newer tracks sound like the Angry Samoans or early Black Flag with a heavy-metal guitarist; there's a solid beat to everything, all the songs are super-fast, the breaks shred… just the thing for anyone into flexing their Mohawk in a circle pit. I bet they're lots of fun at parties. The earlier stuff, recorded on 4-track in someone's basement, has a rawer sound, snottier & more Screeching Weasel-ish songwriting, and some really wretched backup vocals…. But for a teenaged basement demo, it's still fun. If nothing else, this Split CD proves the Aceholes are getting better as they go along. – Jim Testa

ALL NIGHT (Tee Pee Records) Simulacrum: (n) - A copy or reproduction for which no original exists This is the word that best describes the music of Greensboro, North Carolina's All Night. By combining the worst elements of Black Sabbath, Thin Lizzy, and Lynyrd Skynyrd (before you get all upset, I will admit that all of these bands have many wonderful qualities if you will concede that they can also be shallow, bombastic, and downright stupid at times), All Night create a music that is both unoriginal and uninteresting. Their self-titled debut album isn't even a parody of bland 70's arena rock. It's a parody of stoner rock steeped in bland 70's arena rock, and the saddest thing is that they don't even seem to be aware of it. All Night ape the worst elements of their inspiration and manage to surpass them in banality. It's all there: The plodding blues riffs that go nowhere, the double lead guitars on every goddamn song, the strained white blues vocal delivery, and on top of it all, the most contrived and inane lyrics one can imagine. Here's a perfect example from the song "Come On Baby" - "You've got a little car/It's got a lot of speed/Give it a little more gas baby/I cn't wait for what I need/Well you've got some money/Well we could have some fun/Oh come on pretty baby/Tell me I'm the One." In comparison, Lynyrd Skynyrd seems downright profound and innovative. It seems that All Night is only trying to inject some mindless fun into the overly earnest and melodramatic climate of today's independent music scene, but they've only accomplished half their goal. - Daniel Madri

The Aceholes

ALLISTER - *Last Stop Suburbia* (Drive Thru Records) Allister premiered some of their new record on this past summer's Warped Tour. The songs here sound as good as they did live. producer Chris Fudirich (Rx Bandits, Nada Surf), captures the band's musical growth. Full of energetic pop/punk, this album will keep the kids bouncing for a long time to come! Any song here, and I mean ANY SONG, has melodic, sing-a-long hooks that are irresistible! "Radio Player" is the standout-sure-to-be-a-hit-single. On it, Allister captures the power and mystery that makes you want to crank up a tune on the radio. It's the type of song that you say, 'Damn, I want to hear that again.' Their songs conjure up what it's like to live in suburbia, much like Springsteen did on "Born to Run." The final test of finding a good band for me are my kids. If Steve (he likes Catch 22, Reel Big Fish, etc.), and Melissa (she likes Simple Plan, Ataris, etc.), both like it, (and they do), you can almost bet it's gonna be a big hit! - Phil Rainone

THE ALPHABET BOMBERS - *Wreckless* (Spindrift Records). The Alphabet Bombers are helping to revive a ferocious sound that barely registered with the masses the last time around. When Retroswing started a few years ago, they also brought in rejuvenated Rockabilly bands. Spindrift Records was instrumental in bringing over (from England), Big Boy Bloater & His Southside Stompers. They mixed swing music with raw, R&B. The Alphabet Bombers are a little less polished, but the result is more spontaneous riffing throughout the album. There's alot of spunk and moxie in songs like "Far From Good," "Jane Doe," & "Mugshot." The closing song "Sock Hop Murder," puts the album over-the-top with it's sheer power and intensity! The extra song (about 2 min. after #12), is a cool, slow burning inst. cover of Eddie Cochran's "Summertime Blues." - Phil Rainone

THE AMAZING VERTICALVILLE (Slide the Needle, 1318 Maryland Drive, Ladson, South Carolina 29456, www.slidetheneedle.com) This is the first CD I've reviewed after a bit of a hiatus, and am I ever thankful it was this one that I started off with. This is very cool stuff, a little bit in the vein of Sonic Youth, but very much its own music. It's very upbeat, driving stuff that blends guitar, drums, and synth in a unique way. There are nine tracks of instrumentals on here, and the opener, "Short Attention Span Theatre," is nothing short of astounding. It's a little bit dissonant, but always melodic. It uses whistles to punctuate and emphasize its points. "Entrance to the Penguin Exhibit at Seaworld," on the other hand, has clanging guitars and breezy, flowing synth, a combination one wouldn't normally consider, but it works here. The rest is variations on these themes, plus a sample here and there. "Technicolor Yawn" adds an occasional Buddhist bell along with the intensely naked drumming and the whistlethat reappears here. Cool stuff. Recommended. – Paul Silver

...AND YOU WILL KNOW US BY THE TRAIL OF THE DEAD – "The Secret of Elena's Tomb" EP (Interscope) Like all of you, I've read lot of hype about this band, who seemed to be everywhere about a year ago. Their curious, cocky, and ridiculously long name piqued my interest too. Now I've finally heard them. Much more influenced by European spacey pop than I would have imagined, and much more produced, ...Trail Of The Dead didn't exactly disappoint me, but neither am I overwhelmed. This is girlfriend music, I think. – Johnny Puke

ANGELS OF LIGHT – *Everything Is Good Here/Please Come Home* (Young God Records, P.O. Box 150-031, Van Brunt Station, Brooklyn, NY 11215) What's to be said about Michael Gira? It's difficult not to hear his influence over countless bands today that describe themselves as dark, industrial, or brooding. Even in the heavy metal scene, the Swans influence rears its head. Thing is, by the time a lot of these bands incorporate their prayers to Gira, it's second or third-hand influence. They know not the god they wish to be. This is the ubiquitous influence of Gira. For the third release of Angels of Light, Michael assembled a host of amazing musicians. He claims it's the best release yet under that moniker, and I am very much inclined to believe him. This record is methodical and intense, even at its most subtle. Gira merely opens his mouth and the carnivalesque is envoked—add to this a biting urgency, clearly expressed from the scream to the whisper, and an interplay of acoustic guitar, "treated" guitar, violin, mandolin, trombone, banjo, and a children's choir, and what you get is a small masterpiece from a veteran of pain, loss, and condensed anger. There's a tour coming up, kids. Do you local "goth" band a favor and buy them some tickets. --Greg Matherly

THE ANKLES - *Kill Themselves* (Magadee Records, PO Box 666, Hoboken NJ 07030) With a record title like *Kill Themselves* and a post office box that is actually, I guess, 666, I was expecting an angry, furious, potentially sloppily recorded and played mass of anger. But I heard instead a fuzzy pop-inspired band that seemed out of sync with such an antagonistic moniker for their release. The Ankles, led by guitarist/vocalist Shaun Towey, reminded me of Dinosaur Jr. without the noise or experimentalism. All ten tracks progress at a similar pace, as Towey's melodic voice rarely demonstrates a shift in emotion. I think there is potential for broad appeal, however, because the warm guitar playing is loud without being threatening and fans of straightforward guitar pop will easily adopt each of the songs. While the Ankles may not be brash, they are not bubblegum, disposable pop either. Songs like "On Ice" and "Everything Curves" are solid tracks, but as a whole, the record seemed bland and somewhat recycled in nature. I guess if the listener here is young or inexperienced, this may catch on, but if you're over 23, you have heard this more times than you would care to remember. - Rich Quinlan

THE APPLESEED CAST - *Lost Songs* (Deep Elm Records, PO Box 36939, Charlotte, NC 28236, wwww.deepelm.com) "Oh, my fucking god!" was my reaction while listening to the absolute stunner of an opening track, "E to W," which is a wild, spacey, flowing kind of track in a Spiritualized kind of vein, but with nice weird touches instead of perfect precision. The second track, "Peril, Parts 1, 2, and 3," starts off as more of an alt- pop-punkish sort of tune, but it slowly evolves into an epic masterpiece with rich textures in the arrangement. Other tracks range from decent alt-pop to powerful emo-influenced sagas in music. Some tracks, like "State N W/K" (don't you love these song titles?) go back and forth within the same song, alternating between the manic energy of over-the-top emo and am almost ambient-pop sound. This is very cool stuff. Highly recommended. - Paul Silver

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ARAB ON RADAR - *The Stolen Singles* (Three.One.G. Records, PO Box 178262, San Diego, CA 92177) One of the most deliciously bizarre bands in the world, Providence Rhode Island's Arab On Radar are noisy, chaotic brilliance along the lines of The Locust and fellow Ocean State legends, Lightning Bolt. If you have not heard this band before or have not dutifully followed their career, this is a perfect place to start. Collecting singles and rare efforts from 1995-present, *Stolen Singles* allows you to hear the development of the band from angular guitar feasts like "Inventor" and "7.2" from 1995 to the twisted genius of 1998's "Swimming With a Hard-On" and "Miss American Hair Pie". Clearly, the largest tribute to the band is how they have improved and tweaked their sound throughout their career, for as you listen, you are swallowed up by the increasingly bold experimentation of "3 Meals Away From a Crack Whore" and "Running for Asthma". Arab On Radar is a band for those who taste lay outside the mainstream. Simply amazing. - Rich Quinlan

THE ARRIVALS – *Exsenator Orange* (Thick Records www.thickrecords.com) I guess I liked the last album by these guys as I have the sticker that came with the CD affixed to my computer. Then again, I really like stickers. So having no recollection of their music, I popped *Exsenator Orange* (?) into my CD player and try to remember. Ah yes, here we go. The Arrivals are now one in an ever growing number of punk bands from the Midwest who hold Husker Du's *Flip Your Wig* as Bible in one hand and a pint of Guinness in the other, and believe me – I'm not complaining. Throaty, energetic punk with lyrics about things sucking and being a loser while at the same time wishing things didn't suck and wishing to be less of a loser. Bob and Grant would be proud. – Oliver Lyons

ARTICLES OF FAITH - *Complete Volumes 1 & 2* (Alternative Tentacles, PO BOX 419092, San Francisco, CA 94141-9092) A near comprehensive collection of this stellar Chicago outfit's recordings, spanning the years1981-1985, is now available in two concise volumes from Alternative Tentacles. Methodically chronicling the speed-addled uproar that encompassed especially thought provoking diatribes by this caustic mid-western force, this two part series, containing a total of thirty-eight songs, traces a path that is both progressive and linear. From the band's rawer inception to their existence as a more rhythmically-oriented and succinct (but no less brutal) unit capable of both harrowing musical precision and an especially noteworthy intelligence and empathy, this compilation succeeds in capturing Articles Of Faith in all of their multi-faceted glory. Imbued in the lyrical counterpart to the tonal wreckage is an ever present and uncanny wit and insight that strays from sloganeering or snotty pretense, as showcased on such seminal classics as the vitriolic condemnation of workplace monotony that is "In Your Suit", the menacing anthem "What We Want Is Free", and the utterly desperate "Up Against The Wall". The songs have been culled from a vast portion of the band's repertoire, spanning numerous 7" recordings, live sessions, the "What We Want Is Free" and "Wait" EPs, and the "Give Thanks" and "In This Life" LPs. Essentially, this is the blueprint for an uncanny amount of the blitz speed, technically proficient, albeit raw and *inventive,* hardcore punk that was to follow in the band's footsteps, and the sheer might and velocity inherent in their sound is something to behold. Tracing a shift in sound and drive from an early enveloping cacophony to a more succinct, unique tumult, and culminating in the comparatively melodic interplay that transpired at the end of their lengthy tour of duty (highlighted by a more personal and overtly poignant lyrical slant), this compilation is a gem, bearing a painstakingly preserved testament to one of the finest and most influential musical legacies in hardcore. –Mike Ramek

Bring up the words "positive hardcore" and Washington, DC and most punk fans will automatically think of Minor Threat. Mention "positive hardcore" and Chicago and the reaction won't be so quick. Yet Chicago's Articles of Faith were forging an all-ages hardcore scene for themselves in the same way their DC cohorts were, promoting and playing shows for and with the likes of Husker Du, Bad Brains, MDC and Die Kreuzen at an all-ages spot called the Centro-American Social Club. AOF were also way ahead of their time, an early incarnation of emo hardcore a full four years before Rites of Spring supposedly invented the genre, and incorporated reggae, jazz and funk into their punk fury. Lead singer Vic Bondi went on to play in Jones Very and Alloy, but not before four righteous and riotous years in AOF, in which he and his Chicago bandmates shook up the old school Oi crowd in Chicago with their thrashy yet sensitive left wing hardcore attack. AOF are sadly forgotten by many hardcore fans, but this two-disc anthology is permanent documentation of an important band, not only in Chicago but in the world of hardcore. Everything they ever recorded is here, including a few live songs, and like all anthologies (especially *double* anthologies), it' s a lot to handle in one sitting, but the diamonds shine through the small amount of roughage. Blasts of rage like "In Your Suit" (from their *Give Thanks* LP) and "Buy This War" (from the *Wait* EP), as well as melodic gems like "False Security" (from the *Mastertape* LP) and "Remain in Memory" (from the Bob Mould-produced *In This Life* LP) prove the staying power of a positive hardcore band that was just as inspirational as, if not musically superior to, Minor Threat. – Jason Schreurs

AS TALL AS LIONS - *Blood and Aphorisms* (www.astallaslions.com) This was not easily deciphered. The bulk of the liner notes was devoted to a lengthy quote from Nietzsche, but musically, the band was far more conventional than the legendary German philosopher. With soaring vocals and a penchant for well-crafted melodies, As Tall As Lions play music that is both mature and accessible. However, it also becomes a bit repetitive at times for my liking. The beauty of "Break Blossom" and "And the Wick Went Black" is impossible to deny, especially the latter, which is accompanied by the most gentle of piano. The band did impress with the five and half minutes "A Fighting Word", a song whose tempo altered regularly. Although the song needed nearly two minutes to find it's musical stride, once it locked in, the band played with a purpose. The closing piano ballad, "Goodnite Noises Everywhere" was pretty, but did not help to define what path the band wanted to follow. This is a nice release from an act that cold tap into a mainstream audience, but not my particular style. -Rich Quinlan

ASOBI SEJSU (www.asobiseksu.com) An interesting blend of synth-pop and wall-o-fuzz-guitar. Think Stereolab meets My Bloody Valentine. The music is sparkly, unlike the shoegazer melancholy of MBV. Lyrics are alternately in English or Japanese, sung by keyboardist & vocalist Yuki Chikudate, for the most part (though guitarist James Hanna gets in on the act occasionally). Later in the disc, the tunes slow down a bit and tend to get swirlier, with more of a "late-night" feel to them, if you understand what I'm trying to describe. A really nice album here. - Paul Silver

THE ATARIS - *So Long, Astoria* (Columbia Records) Socal's beloved "modern rock" group The Ataris get the major label bread and craft an album that's 45 of angst, reflection and post-teen depression. I have to wonder if The Ataris' key demographic of twelve to eighteen year olds will appreciate a sentiment like "being grown up isn't half as fun as growing up" the same way someone like myself who's now a card carrying member of the nine-to-five world can? With *So Long, Astoria,* The Ataris have effectively combined adult contemporary lyrics with the sugar coated pop-punk that all the kids are ga-ga for these days and created an album that's either gonna hit big or tank like the Hindenburg. If Blink-182 wrote an entire album about how fun it was being in Blink-182, would anyone buy it? The Ataris aim to find out. Good luck boys. - Oliver Lyons

ATOM AND HIS PACKAGE – *Attention. Blah, Blah, Blah* (Hopeless Records) Atom and His Package release far too much stuff. Atom really needs a nine to five because I swear this is the third release I've received from him in the past two months! Anyhow, if you are at all aware of the Atom, this is more of the same. For what it's worth Atom has really managed to turn his one-trick novelty act into a credible music career. His songs have really improved, as has his songwriting. Attention, Blah, Blah, Blah finds Atom re-visiting old topics like the Middle East and bike riding but also moving into new areas such as fretting over his grandmother being left alone, gambling and smoking. With insanely catchy synth beats combined with funny, witty and very intelligent lyrics Atom again proves he's here to stay so either accept him as genius or sit the hell down. – Oliver Lyons

AVAIL - *Front Porch Stories* (Fat Wreck Chords) Avail's bio boasts that the band is, "Hickoid southern punk mosh masters..." With the intensity of their music (any song), I can envision the pit that these hard-core punks could create at a live show! Fresh, compelling riffs that stress the lyrics. For a band that's been around since '93 (this is their 6th album), they still have plenty of genuine angst in their tuneage. What's also cool about Avail is, that you can't categorize the music. It comes at you from all different sides. Their base is Punk, keeping their three-chord roots to the extreme. They don't "modernize" their sound in favor of raps or raggas. The songs have a natural progression and feel. - Phil Rainone

BASTARDS OF MELODY - *Break Up* (Ransom/Face Down Records) Indie, emo, post-punk, anti-folk... we've got way too many labels these days and not nearly enough good rock 'n' roll bands. So here's a tip of the hat to the Bastards of Melody, who realize that good songs and a nice melody are still what count. The Bastards' first few records always had a few outstanding tracks and, alas, some filler; but with *Break Up,* singer/guitarist Paul Crane and company have come up with an album's worth of top-notch tunes. From the uptempo oomph of the opening "What's On Your Mind" to the party fun of "Erin's 25th" to the slacker anthem "Fuck Wakin' Up," there's just one punchy, bouncy, head-bobbing tune after another. The Bastards have always been compared to the Replacements and I think I've finally figured out why; Crane, like Paul Westerberg, has a voice that's instantly likeable. Here's the guy you'd want to be sitting next to at a bar if you were stranded in some strange town without any friends. So whether he's singing about the ups and downs of relationships or just laying his heart on the line (as on the beautiful, acoustic "This Could Be Your Life," an indie rocker's lament inspired by Michael Azerrad's book *Our Band Could Be Your Life*), all you get is the real deal: No poses, no bullshit, no attempt at being trendy - just a guy and a guitar and – as the opening track goes – what's on his mind. Let's not forget the rest of the band – lead guitarist Bill Zafiros, drummer Jeff Prosetti, and since-departed bassist Scott Tully. – Jim Testa

BAXTER (Will Not Clear Man Records, PO Box 911, Elgin, IL 6011-0911, www.willnotclearman.com) This is classic midwestern emo. It's got the guitar sound that made Chicago punk bands of the 80s famous, and it's got the emo-vocals similar to Gauge, but maybe even a bit more early Fugazi-era Ian MacKaye-ish. The two disc set is definitely divided into two sections. Disc 1 is obviously earlier material, not as cleanly recorded, and a rawer, gritttier guitar sound. Disc 2 has better recording quality and a more mature sound, more melodic, more, well, emotional. The end of Disc 2 has some more older material, including the Minor Threat-esque "I'm a Cop," as well as a live recording of "Provisions." It's too bad that this song doesn't have a studio version on here, because it's a fucking awesome song, probably one of the best on the disc, but it suffers from poor live-recording quality. Overall, a good pair of discs here, that all emo fans should pick up. - Paul Silver

BENNY- *Finnish Road Junction* (Boss Tuneage, P.O. Box74-Sandy-Bedfordshire-Sg19 2WB – UK) This is thefirst time I have heard of this band and I was instantly hooked! Their comedic antics give much needed relief to the "serious punk" that is out today. This band really brought a smile to my face and Euro pride to heart, if bands such as Atom and his Package and Dropkick Murphys gave you these feelings than Benny is for you. Their cover of "Down Under" was amazing and inventive; I always like covers that have been converted to other musical forms. The songs really flow and the band seems to have great chemistry. I would also like to note that even in the length of the CD (10 reasonably short tracks,) they made an impression that they are different from any other bands out there and are ready to fight those who would question them. It's perfect pub music. They're just all around kick ass! - Caitlin Mason

BENNY / BABY LITTLE TABLETS- SPLIT EP (Boss Tuneage, P.O. Box74-Sandy-Bedfordshire-Sg19 2Wb-UK)This 7-inch vinyl has songs from the CD *Finnish Road Junction* which I have already deemed amazing. The blue and white splattered record also houses two tracks from the Tokyo band Baby Little Tablets, a seriously different band then I have ever heard. I liked the sound and the two bands truly complement each other quite nicely. This EP is a must have. - Caitlin Mason

BITCHIN' - *The Night Life, the Tight Style* (No Idea) Samantha Jones' (also of Rumbleseat) incredible voice propels this dirth of rhythmic, distorted, guitar driven power chord romp. Two girls and a guy from Gainsville, FL tell of a yearning to be free, lost loves and life's failures and frustrations. Raw, tuneful and worth acquiring. – Tom Brebric

BLACK DICE - *Beaches And Canyons* (DFA Records) On earlier releases, Brooklyn's Black Dice limited their aural experiments to ear-splitting outbursts of audio violence. On "Beaches & Canyons" – a 60-minute double-LP, also released on a single CD divided into four "sides," and the band's first official full-length - the Dice have mellowed their sound into soothing, abstract soundscapes that could easily pass for one of those New Age 'nature' CD's that help insomniacs fall asleep. Two members of the band -- Eric Copeland, electronic percussion, and Hisham Bharoocha, drums -- are credited as vocalists, but you'll be hard pressed to discern anything that sounds like singing. Instead, there's treated guitar courtesy of Bjorn Copeland; electronic "drone machine," reel to reel tape loops, and some bass from Aaron Warren; and a small arsenal of analog and digital synthesizers, creating sounds that range from ocean waves slapping ashore to chirping crickets to the twitters, pulses, beeps and boops of a robotic brain having a nervous breakdown. "Things Will Never Be The Seem," my favorite track, combines otherworldly melodies with ululating vocals, feedback loops, and the sound of a baby crying. It's weird, it's different, and no, you can't dance to it. But if you'd like to lose yourself in your headphones for an hour, you could certainly do a lot worse. – Jim Testa

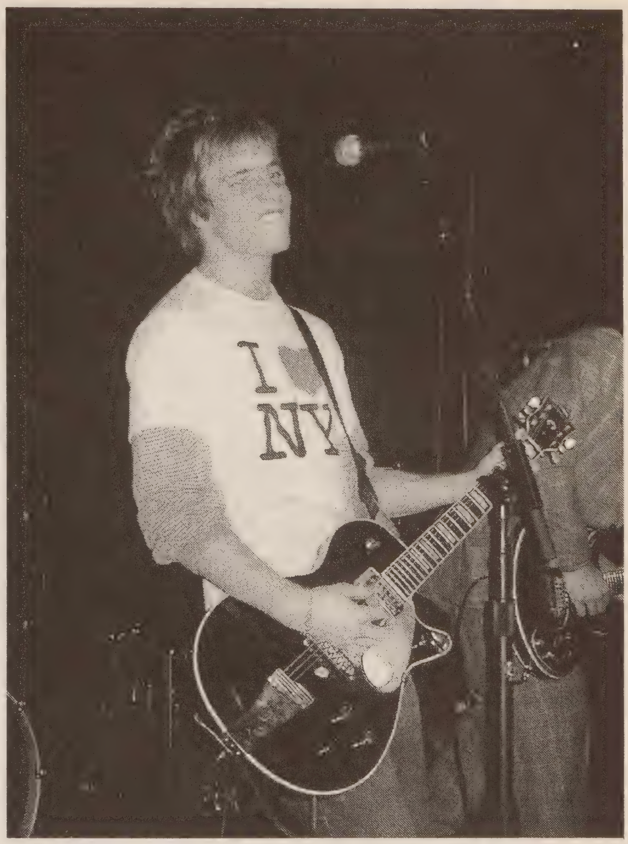
THE BLAKES - "New Tattoo" 6 --song EP (22 Thatchwood Ct., No. Brunswick NJ 08902; www.theblakesonline.com) The Blakes call themselves a "pop" band, but what does that mean today? This isn't the supercilious dance music that 'tweens listen to on Radio Disney, and it's not sugary, smiley-faced "power pop" or "pop punk." I'm not sure what to call this except, perhaps, the New Classic Rock. The music is rich, dreamy, harmonic, but not particularly happy; in fact, there's an edginess and a sorrow in many of these tunes that's almost palpable. You hear echoes here of the Who, the Beatles, and Cheap Trick - thundering drums, huge power chords, lush creamy harmonies, and a singer who glides effortlessly into feathery falsettos. Another band called the Raspberries pulled the same influences together back in the 70's and came up with a very similar sound, but the Raspberries are only remembered today (if at all) for launching the solo career of Eric Carmen, he of the saccharine power-ballad "All By Myself." The Blakes are never saccharine - as in too sweet to be real. Yeah, Rock is back. But unlike the new wave of minimalist garage-rockers – from the Strokes to Mooney Suzuki to the Vines – The Blakes don't run away from real feelings. Nor do they worship the beat to the exclusion of all else. The Blakes embrace melody, shower themselves in harmony, and wallow in emotion. This is music to fall in love to. And fall in love with. -- Jim Testa

BLASTMAT - *1984* (www.blastmat.com) Old school punk band with a low fidelity sound. They don't break any new ground in their genre, but will definitely keep the kids dancing! - Phil Rainone

THE BLINDING LIGHT - *Glass Bullet* (Deathwish Records) Interwoven, textured spasms of experimental metallic bludgeoning contrast with a jarringly straight forward Tom Araya-esque vocal delivery, creating unusual contrasts on the Deathwish debut from The Blinding Light. Technical start and stop riff schemes wallow, crawl and drone more than they overtly rip, as down tuned lick sprawl thunders on with near constant mid-tempo rhythmic fluctuation. A frenetic yet thankfully unimposing progression of double bass pedal wizardry further adds to the novel grooves created within each pulsing number. Though a few dull tangential noise forays detract from the heightened energy here, there is an often driving quality to many of these noise escapades that validates this unusual and eclectic concoction of metallic styles. –Mike Ramek

THE BLOOD BROTHERS - *Burn Piano Island, Burn* (ArtistDirect Records) YES! This record is fantastic! I don't know where these guys came from but everyone should thank the Rock Gods for bestowing this amazing album upon our humble ears. Renowned producer Ross Robinson who has disgraced us by bringing us the likes of Limp Bizkit, Slipknot, Korn but redeemed himself with the discoveries of bands like Glassjaw and At the Drive In produces this, their major label debut, and when it comes out in early 2003 be prepared to have the face of Rock change. This, in a fair world, will break down some doors, blow the roof off the motherfucker. Remember, Nirvana? Yeah, THAT big. What Refused started, The Blood Brothers will finish. Words can't come close to describing the genius of this. Chaotic yet catchy, disjointed yet enthralling, tounge in cheek yet dead serious, brooding yet exuberant, familiar yet distant. Musically they recreate the mold of what is possible or expected with rock instrumentation. Lyrically they paint tantalizing word paintings; haunting, sureal, poignant. They do this while retaining the ability to write a song that people can latch onto. Every song is a potential hit without succumbing to trite cliches or pandering. From the opening salvo of the incendiary "Guitarmy" (pure fury distilled into 37 seconds) to the closing refrains of closer "The Shame", this thing never, ever disappoints and raises the bar that much further with every track. I just can't say enough good things about this record so I'll shut up so as to not stain my nose further. By January this should be pumping from every self respecting "New" Rock station in the country. This is hardcore for the 21st century. Prepare yourselves! - Eric Walls

BLOODBATH - *Resurrection Through Carnage* (Century Media) Okay, I know this is Jersey Beat and all, but I'm sure some of you reading this remember the glory days of early Death Metal waaay back in the late 80's, early 90's when Florida bands like Death, Obituary, Cancer, Morbid Angel and Swedish bands like Dismember, Grave, and Entombed reveled in brutal yet ultimately catchy brand of extreme metal that actually had hooks and intelligible riffs (if not vocals!) as opposed to modern Death's tendency towards dizzying speed and technicality over actual songcrafting. Well, maybe some of you don't remember but 4 of Europe's elite metal masters Mikel Akerfeldt (of Opeth fame/vocals), Dan Swano (Nightingale, Edge of Sanity/drums), Anders Nystrom (Katatonia, Diabolical Masquerade/guitar) and Jonas Renke (Katatonia, October Tide/bass) do and this is their tribute to the old school. Not a tribute album, mind you, as these are all original compositions, but a tribute to the spirit and the form of the fathers of Death. And given the caliber of the musicians hee they pay their homage very, very ably. They manage to to this all while maintaining a distinct originality and kicking out some raging old school death style anthems. My favs inc. opener "Ways to the Grave", "Buried By the Dead", "Soulcollector", "Trail of Insects". I've been pumping this at work and scaring away all the customers! Get this! - Eric Walls



PICK HIT: THE BLAKES "New Tattoo" EP

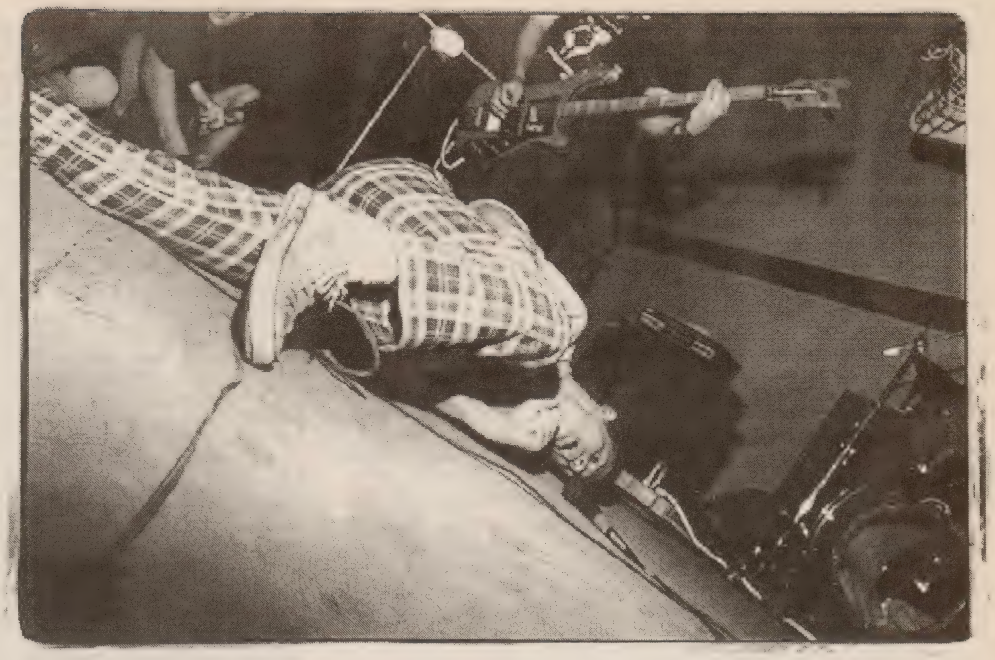
BOMBSHELL ROCKS - *From Here And On* (Epitaph) I usually don't like to compare a band's sound to other bands ("overtones of The Clash," etc.). All throughout "From Here And On," I kept getting a strong vibe from an 80's band that I couldn't place. Finally, by the 9th song "Untitled," it hit me. The Alarm! Both they and Bombshell Rocks write passionate, catchy, songs that can't be categorized. They blend punk, rock, alt. & a little folk rock, injected with heartfelt lyrics with integrity. Engaging hooks, and the sheer power of the the music I think, will make this one of the best bands of '03! - Phil Rainone

BON VOYAGE - *The Right Amount* (Tooth & Nail Records, P.O. Box 12698, Seattle WA 98111, WWW.Toothandnail.com) For those of you who don't normally delve into the world of female vocals, it is imperative you put aside those pre-conceived notions, and allow the wonders of Julie Martin's voice to enter your mind. All you have to do is lie on your bed and yield to the sweet textures of Martin's eminence, while she takes you to a higher place. Bon Voyage is a collaboration between Martin and her husband Jeff (StarFlyer 59) that travels through a cloudy haze of pop and crafty synth work. David Lynch would be doing himself a favor by including these sonic moments of bliss on his next soundtrack. – Dan Storchan

VIC BONDI & ARTICLES OF FAITH – "Fortunate Son" EP (Alternative Tentacles) Released as a statement on Bush's rush to war with Iraq, this four song EP has a wartime theme, with two new songs by ex-AOF frontman Vic Bondi and two songs that are now 20years old from his former band. The solo tracks that open the EP are surprisingly strong, with a more modern sound that doesn't compromise the conviction of Bondi's screamy, angry delivery nor his anti-war sentiments. He also covers Creedence Clearwater Revival's Vietnam-era classic "Fortunate Son," a song that's become nearly as much a punk cliché as "Louie Louie." But Bondi includes it to prove a point, I suppose – that bands have been rocking against war for over four decades now. Also included, and recorded 20 years ago, are "Buy This War" and the hardcore classic "American Dreams" by Bondi's former band, Articles Of Faith. Both of these war-themed songs are just as relevant today as CCR, and "American Dreams" was produced by Bob Mould. All these years later, Mould's still depressed and Bondi's still pissed. Who woulda though? – Johnny Puke

BORN AGAINST - *Patriotic Battle Hymns* (Kill Rock Stars, Po Box 25520, Chicago IL 60625) Celebrating the skill of Born Against would seem redundant; the band was simply one of the best bands of the early 90's, writing hardcore that was sharp, politically astute and punishing. *Patriotic Battle Hymns*, lovingly re-released by Kill Rock Stars, will allow you to hear again (or for the first time?) a band that was as skilled as they were angry, churning frustration with race, class and American culture into eruptions of angst-filled guitar force. The still-rough incarnation of the band is heard on the first nine tracks of the disc, originally released as *Nine Patriotic Hymns for Children*, but the nucleus of the band's brilliance is there on "Nine Years Later", "Mary and Child" and "Jock Gestapo". There is a noticeable increased crispness of the playing during the latter half of the disc, as by 1993's *Battle Hymns of the Race War*, Born Against was a machine, their music now focused and cascading with intensified awareness. Check out "Murder the Sons of Bitches", "Foot Bound and Hobbled", "Sendero" or "Set Your AM Dial for White Empowerment". It is more than a little scary to think that much of what Born Against condemned is now either back in power, or never left, right down to the hilarious Phil Donahue (who thought he'd ever be back?) sample buried at the end of the disc in which singer Sam McPheeters made a legendary phone call. This is as pertinent now as when it was first released. - Rich Quinlan

BORN AGAINST - *The Rebel Sound of Shit and Failure* (Kill Rock Stars, Po Box 25520, Chicago IL 60625) Kill Rock Stars has delivered a staggering collection of the best of Born Against's all too brief four-year history. Compiling tracks from 7-inch releases as well as compilations, *The Rebel Sound of Shit and Failure* take you through the development of the band. From the rough edges of "Well Fed Fuck" and "The Good Father" to the rare "Janelle", taken from a 1994 Lookout! Split release with Screeching Weasel., or the incredible "Wearing a Lampshade", found on a very cool 8-inch record with Man is the Bastard. This gives a new life to a band that should never been forgotten in the first place, but the disc allows fans to collect songs that are nearly impossible to find or have long been out of print. - Rich Quinlan



Born Against **Photo by Shawn Scallen**

THE BOXES (http://www.dopamine-records.com) Pretty okay rock n' roll from some New York girls. The most appealing thing about this band is that they honestly only know four chords. Every song on this 4 song ep is the same riff over and over again played at varying tempos. That rules! Now my marginal guitar talents make me feel like Eddie Van Halen! - Oliver Lyons

BOY SETS FIRE – "Live For Today" EP (Windup Records) Three of the six songs were recorded live right here at Club Krome in So. Amboy. The sound quality is good, and the band's music thrives in the live setting. (Heath Miller of Excess DB has been promoting shows of this caliber for a few years now at Krome). Boys Set Fire premiered a new song (along with "After the Eulogy" and "Rookie"), "Handful of Redemption" that has a tough, hard-core bite to it. You can almost feel the crowd feeding off the band's aggressive energy. The other three songs, including "Release the Dogs" and "Curtain Call," are new studio tracks that will solidify the band's hard-core sound. The mix of energy and melody make these songs memorable and the the songs message will connect with the listener. The full disc is due later this year. Sounds like Boys Set Fire have a solid start with this EP! - Phil Rainone

The major label debut from Boy Sets Fire comes in the form of a six-song EP with partial proceeds going towards social justice groups, so it's good to see the band haven't abandoned their politics for fame and fortune. The three new songs don't disappoint, including an opener ("Release the Dogs") that is at the throat of their heaviest songs to date, and the rhythmic neo-nu-metal groove of "Bathory's Sainthood." The anti-climatic and aptly titled "Curtain Call" leads way to three live songs, two of which are from the *After the Eulogy* set, with the kind of production sound usually reserved for studio time. Big bucks went into this live recording and album quality versions of "Rookie" and another newbie, "Handful of Redemption," are the ultimate pay-off. *Live for Today* ups the ante of eager anticipation for a new full-length from one of hardcore's finest. – Jason Schreurs

BRAZIL – "Dasein" EP (Fearless) Brazil's six song EP adds some different colors to what you're use to hearing from a hard-core (Brazil really stretches the boundries of that term), band. Besides keyboards, they also add piano to some of the songs. "Erasure" is tough, melodic and rocks with an incredibly quiet piano solo in the middle. I'm trying to imagine how songs like this would go over at a show. The music welcomes moshing, but the quiet piano breaks (are beautiful), would stop them dead in their tracks. On the whole, I think it would work. "Saturn Parkway" opens with a quiet, piano waltz (damn, I fell like I'm reviewing opera)! Once you hear the lyrics, they'll bring you back to what Brazil is about. They make music that works on different levels, that will make you think and react. - Phil Rainone

BUD E LUV – *Diary of a Loungeman* (Oglio Records www.oglio.com) Now, I believe this is the same person who does the bossa nova version of Crazy Train on the Osbournes show. But if not, Bud E Luv stole one heck of a good idea. Bud E Luv is a world renowned lounge singer (he's written a book on the subject) and Diary ‘c is fifteen tracks of Black Sabbath and Ozzy material done Vegas style. Oh yes! Ever thought you'd be able to make it with your best guy or gal to ‘gSweet Leaf? ‘h Well now you can. The perfect holiday gift just arrived!! – Oliver Lyons

THE BUSTED LIVES *One Flap Down* (Blueball Records, 6517 Farallon Way, Oakland CA 94103) *One Flap Down* offers the listener nothing more than buzzsaw rock & roll with lo-fi production and an amateur's love of the genre, the Busted Lives too cool to be old school. Roaring and rattling like a hopped-up '74 Mercury on high-octane homebrew, tunes like "Hac Man" or "Landlord's Bitch" represent the artistic ghetto of the '60s garage rock aesthetic currently championed by the American rockcrit fraternity. With tongues placed firmly in their collective cheeks, bassist "Mr. Arafat," guitarist "Mr. Valiant," drummer "Mr. Lotion" and vocalist "Mr. Mobutu" drop musical bombs like the riff-happy "Beaked Forever" or the echo-drenched "Drinking Like An Oakland Raider" with reckless glee. A shambling trainwreck of retro-rock, *One Flap Down* is nevertheless a hell of a lot of fun. Somewhere Sky Saxon is laughing maniacally at the chaos he has unleashed.... – Rev. Keith A. Gordon

THE C*NTS – *La La La* (Disturbing Records, 3238 S. Racine, Chicago IL 60608) These guys pronounce the name "C-Nuts," although I suspect most of their underground fans just call them the Cunts. Whatever... If your idea of garage-rock is the Realistics or Mooney Suzuki, you probably won't know what to make of these ageless mooks (from Chicago or thereabouts) who have been churning out three-chord classics in their garage for longer than anybody really needs to know. This is classic three-chord romp 'n' stomp rock 'n' roll, real simple and really raunchy, 17 songs and most of them clock in under 3 minutes. If you're wondering where today's garage-rockers got the idea, or if you're already a fan of bands like the Lyres, Fleshtones, Chesterfield Kings (or the original 60's bands on the Nuggets compilations), then good luck trying to find anything you can by The C*nts. – Jim Testa

CALLA - *Televise* (Arena Rock Recording Company, 242 Wythe Ave., Studio 6, Brooklyn, NY, 11211) Without the luxury of knowing this band is from New York (by way of Texas) it might have been easy to mistake them for a British band. The gruff vocals and deep melancholy on Televise sound very Joy Division, but there's also a faint Smiths quality in the morose yet upbeat songs. Ultimately, this is art rock for the arty; fans of Sonic Youth, Blonde Redhead and the like will certainly relate to the soundscape qualities of Calla's atmospheric capabilities. Sometimes brilliant, often boring, *Televise* is the type of record only those with an empty existence could relate to, which would explain their blossoming popularity. - Jason Schreurs

CAPITAL CITY - *Am I Invisible* (Near by Music, P.O. Box 441448, Somerville, PA 02144) A very inventive pop rock group. "This Town Won't Be the Same" is awesome! I'll admit that there were some songs I wished that were in the same style as the song before-these guys cover a lot of ground! Eclectic is cool and all, but jeez... Overall, a good disc. Standouts include: "Whistleblower" and "Council Embassy." - Mike Chant5 DAYS AHEAD – *As Life Passes You By...* (Pumpkineater Records, PO Box 144, Iselin, NJ, 08830) If I had more time, and didn't have a hug pile of CDs staring me in the face, I might find myself getting into 5 Days Ahead. They have that harmonized emo rock thing going, but also add in some aggro background vocals and some chunkier riffing here and there. A couple of the finer moments bring to mind early Jimmy Eat World, but a slow pace to the album and some sappier moments has me shuffling through all the stuff yet to be reviewed. The frat-friendly band photos also had me screaming for the exits. – Jason Schreurs

THE CAPITOL YEARS - "Jewelry Store" EP (Full Frame Records; www.fullframerecords.com) The Beatles are never far from us, as witnessed by Philadelphia garage-rockers The Capitol Years. Frontman Shai Halperin (aka Shai, Son Of Eli) channels Lennon's sardonic rasp as his bandmates echo Harrison's pop jangle, Ringo's signature beats, and the Fab Four's goose-pimple inducing harmonies. But "Jewelry Store" is more than phony Beatlemania run amuck; it's catchy, adrenaline-fueled garage-rock, with Dave Wayne Daniels' bouncing bass lines anchoring infectious, head-wagging melodies that seem much more alive than the sterile, soulless posturing of so many of today's neo-garagesters. Produced by Halperin and Thom Monahan (who helped engineer the sparkling neo-psychedelic sound of the Beachwood Sparks,) "Jewelry Store" captures the cheery lo-fi vibe of "Meet The Beatles" without sacrificing any of the energy of the Capitol Years' bravura live performances, which have propelled them to the forefront of Philly's back-from-the-dead music scene. Roll over, Mooney Suzuki, and tell the Strokes the news, there's a new garage band on the prowl who know how to shake it up. – Jim Testa

CATFISH COURTESY - */?* (147 N 600, W Valparaiso, IN 46385) Sometimes you hear a band that is so unabashedly bizarre that you cannot help but be intrigued. Catfish Courtesy's second release was simply a jam session captured on tape and */?* follows that tradition. Fifteen musical experiments are boldly and brazenly presented for the entertainment of some, confused looks of most and even a few cutting words of condemnation. I, however, happily place myself in that first group, for I was wildly entertained by the uneven delivery and there is something nearly hypnotic about what these kids do. Any style of musical genre can be found here, including rock, funk, pop and noise. From oi! chants ("Sound 014") to childish gurgling ("Our Band is Stuck Under Water"), */?* bounces and occasionally rocks with a sense of pure fun. Much of this disc is comprised of brief tracks, but within the brevity lies a great deal of inspiration, such as the bass heavy instrumentals "?" and "Call Russ Adams". The majority of songs do not include vocals in the traditional sense, but Lindsay Boggs, the latest official addition to the line-up, does add a spark to "A Quote From the Yearbook", an effort that sounds like a brilliant Velvet Underground tribute, and it's uncertain if these kids even meant to do it. (Take notes, Strokes). The odder the song, the more I found it sticking with me, such as "The Earth's Position Relative to the Sun", or the guitar noise of "Stage-Wise and Thoughtful Persons". I knew people in college who attempted to form bands like this, but they were never as cool as the controlled chaos of Catfish Courtesy. - Rich Quinlan

CAUSTIC RESIN – *Keep On Truckin'* (Up Records, PO Box 21328, Seattle WA 98111) With a voice like Randy Newman on acid and a guitar as deliberate yet dispirited as Neil Young's, ex-Built To Spill dude Brett Netson gives us the sixth full-length from his revolving-door solo project, Caustic Resin. Along for the ride this time are ex-Dinosaur Jr. member Mike Johnson. Caustic Resin has called the Pacific Northwest home for years now, and their spacey yet grungy rock is a testament to those roots. – Johnny Puke

NICK CAVE AND THE BAD SEEDS - *Nocturama* (Mute Records) The latest from the Cave crew is somewhat of a milestone in their long journey from the chaos that was The Birthday Party, to their long-standing status as disciples of all that is dark, melancholy, and lest we forget, murderous. In the last six years we've seen but two proper Bad Seeds albums, and although *The Boatman's Call* and *No More Shall We Part* can each be hailed as the honest and moving indulgence of an *idée fixe*, what both albums lack in their singularity is something Cave has returned to on *Nocturama*—dynamics. Although there is a certain inherent credibility in the area Cave has chosen to work in that keeps one from using words like "mature" and "developed," he and the band have undeniably produced a great Seeds album, versatile in tempo and theme. Granted, a large portion of Cave fans might have trouble crossing from the black reality of death he has been associated with, to a gray metaphor of mere distress and longing, as in the songs, "Dead Man in My Bed," and "Wonderful Life," but energy and passion become all the more tangible for it. "Bring It On," perhaps the most radio-geared tune since "Red-Right Hand," challenges a head-on abandonment There is, however, some lousy filler on the album that would only be redeemable should they be performed as instrumentals. "Rock of Gibraltar" is just downright sappy and weak, whereas "Babe, I'm on Fire" promises a throbbing, piecemeal diatribe against all that is fucked up in a post-modern pastiche of a world, but it's repetitiveness and length undermines it's power, very quickly. You'll only want to hear it once. All said, however, *Nocturama* is a welcome addition to the Bad Seeds body of work—a body which has been promised by Cave to now grow an album a year. Unfortunately for the fans, this release is Blixa Bargeld's last recording as an official Bad Seed. - Greg Matherly

CECIL - *Postcard* (Rathunt Records, P.O. Box 1206, Hoboken, NJ 07030) Energetic and fun! The band's tightness comes through what is ultimately very loose playing, very coy. "Battle Scars" opened as an upbeat rocker with a nice, mildly dissonant beginning. "Lucky" had neat, circus-like bridges between bouts of driving strumming. And what I have to say about "Honey Biscuit" is what a damned fine anthem! Good party song. May good things come to y'all… - Mike Chant

CEMENTHEAD - *February Girls* (www.cementheadnyc.com) Kinda like a young Bob Mould singing Sugar songs on a production budget. Melodic, power-pop that's better than most things in New York these days. - Oliver Lyons

CHAINS IN THE SAND (Siloh Records, www.siloh.com) This is actually the solo project of Nathan Limbaugh, formerly of Burn Karma Burn, who wrote, performed, produced, and recorded the 14 tracks here. Limbaugh has a penchant for repetitive riffs, monotone vocals, and sparse, impressionistic lyrics that read like haikus. There's a somber mood to the entire CD, including the three instrumentals. At times, Limbaugh's murmured vocals and almost ambient soundscapes recall Yo La Tengo. This isn't the kind of CD that's going to slap you in the face with a catchy melody or throbbing beat. It's a low-key affair that works best in the background. – Jim Testa

CHALET CHALET (Walk in Cold Records, 8408 Lakeside Drive, Downers Grove, IL 60516, www.walkincoldrecords.com) Cross a band like The Make-Up with a modern era pop-punk band, raise the offspring in the Chicago area, and you get the likes of Chalet Chalet. It's definitely poppy, definitely has a punk edge, very certainly has the mania, explosive power and raw edge of a band like the Make-Up. And it's Chicago lineage be heard in the distinctiveness of the guitar work. The only disappointment is that this is only a four-song CD-EP and not a full lengther. A promising debut from a band to watch. Recommended. - Paul Silver

CHAMBERLAIN – *Five-Year Diary* (Ignition, 1 Chandos Rd., Turbridge Wells, Kent, TN1 2NY, England) It's questionable whether a double CD of unreleased Chamberlain material (half of which is live songs) is entirely necessary, but fans of this increasingly melodic band from Indiana should take careful note. *Five-Year Diary* is a collection of Chamberlain's '96-'98 demo and live recordings, showing the constant development of the band from their days as hardcore band Split Lip, their debut release as Chamberlain, *Fate's Got a Driver*, and on through to the countrified alternative rock leanings that were to come. The '96 demo is among the best the late '90s emo scene could ever offer, with smoky vocals, melody-drenched guitar chords, swirling bass and brilliantly understated drumming. Singer/guitarist David Moore's lyrics are slices of life that hold up after repeated listens, sometimes with even more impact in the live setting. The inclusion of 15 live songs recorded in Europe and the often sleepy sounding and mostly acoustic '98 demo makes getting through both discs a chore, but, hey, if you've got the time, Chamberlain's got the tunes. - Jason Schreurs

CHANNEL 3 – *CH3* (Dr. Strange Records, PO Box 1058, Alta Loma CA 90701) Channel 3 go all the way back to 1980 and were one of the great early California hardcore bands, with classic anthems like "I've Got A Gun." I remember checking out their early albums on Posh Boy Records and always appreciating their no bullshit, straightahead rock 'n' roll sensibility. After laying low for most of the last decade, the band returns with this rousing album of new punk anthems. Imagine equal parts Misfits, Social Distortion, and the Clash, sung with conviction and big ballsy guitars and great whoa-oa-oa singalong harmonies. Fans of Electric Frankenstein or any good punky rock 'n' roll can just skip the history lesson and rock out to this from start to finish. – Jim Testa

CHARLENE - *Charlene* (Sharkattack! Music, P.O. Box 600-466, Newtonville MA 02460) Warning: This album is meant for a rainy day when you want to lock yourself in your room, feel sorry for yourself, and smoke a fat joint. Do not assume that after listening to this spacey, electronically enhanced full-length debut that you will feel any better about your pathetic existence; however, you certainly will want to listen to the album a few more times as the sun sets, and you realize tomorrow is another day. Fans of Yo La Tengo and early Luna will find this to be an extremely satisfying release. – Dan Storchan

CHARM CITY SUICIDES - *//* (Baths of Power Records, 48 Glen Alpine Rd., Phoenix, MD 21131) Listen to this and go form your own band. Charm City Suicides are, in a word, brilliant. This eleven song, twenty-minute effort, a post-mortem release sadly, is one of the most honest releases that will ever grace your ears. CCS played earnest punk rock that ached with truth and an unpretentious love for what they were saying and doing. *//* is delivered in the finest basement tape mentality, as the quality of the recoding is a little shaky, but the screams of Mike Apichella and Brian Dubin's distortion could not be more pure. In addition to the furious playing, the guys lyrically opened up their hearts concerning pizza, the challenges of relationships, the conditions of modern society and bike riding. It is a shame this band had to break up and a deeper travesty that the guys rarely toured outside of the Mid-Atlantic area of the country. I will publicly here make the demand that CCS please reunite and tour America because more people need to hear the speed and force of "Street Fair" and "Hold On Tight" or the meandering heaviness of "Sleep Deprived". This is what a hungry band sounds like and this will only inspire thousands of others to follow in their path. - Rich Quinlan

THE CHARMS - *Charmed, I'm Sure* (1112 Boylston St, PMB 314, Boston, MA 02215) Yep, I was. A nice 5-person band who look like sort of punkish rock—like folks. Frontperson Ellie Vee wrote the songs with help from guitarist/vocalist Joe Wizda. My first reaction was bubblegum rock. I don't know that there is any such category, but there it is. The opening track, "Top Down," is pure bubblegum with a slightly louder and faster beat than would be consistent with that kind of pop. On "Dragonfly," Ellie mutates into THE DIXIE CHICKS all by herself, although organist/vocalist Kat Kina may be involved. Pure rockabilly. The other 9 songs are tunes about love found, love lost, love that never was or ever will be; the old standard pop/rock stuff. But they are well written. Ellie sings quite well with a rather distinctive voice; enjoyable, understandable and easy to listen to. The band is quite good. Fun album. I suspect this band is dynamite live. Cool liner notes ,too. Check it out. – Rodney Leighton

DARYL CHERNEY & THE CHERNOBLES – "Bush It!"/"Send George Bush a Pretzel" EP (ESP Records/Alternative Tentacles) Two great protest songs about our (p)resident by Earth First! – er, Daryl Cherney (he of getting bombed along with Judi Bari fame). The first is a catchy pop number, with such lyrics as "Then the puppeteer says, hey I got a plan/Though the guys were all Saudis, let's bomb Afghanistan". The second is the superior number, a lively polka with a chorus that will keep you singing for days ("Send George Bush a pretzel/Send one every day") - that is, if the Homeland Security folks don't drag you away first. - Shawn Setaro

NOAM CHOMSKY - *The New War on Terrorism: Fact and Fiction* (Alternative Tentacles/AK Press): The invaluable pairing of Alternative Tentacles and AK Press (hey guys - what took you so long to make the relationship official, anyway?) does it again with this new CD of a lecture by Noam Chomsky. Noam needs no introduction to any follower of progressive/radical politics - in fact, he's probably the reason many of them got interested in politics in the first place. On this CD, which contains a lecture given in Cambridge, MA in October, 2001, he confronts an audience (of which, in the interests of full disclosure, I was a member) shocked and numbed by the events of the previous month, and puts 9/11 in context. While making time for a devastating critique of the war in Afghanistan, examining US terrorism and flouting of international law in Nicaragua, pointing out the Nazi philosophical roots of today's counter-terrorism methods, and giving a brief summary of centuries of US and European imperialism, he manages to point out the most commonsensical way for the United Sttes to reduce the level of terror in the world - "namely, stop participating in it." Go, Noam! - Shawn Setaro

CHRISTIANA – *Fatigue Kills* (High School Champion, PO Box 86003, 670 Bloor St. W., Toronto, ON, M6G 1L0, Canada) – It's a strange experience hearing a band several years after totally forgetting about them. Toronto's Christiana, formerly known as Neck, have been around since 1993 and it was around that time I reviewed their first 7". A lot has changed since then, and not just their name; gone is the mind-numbing noise and distortion of their earlier material, making way for cleaner melodies and subtler arrangements. The two guitarists still know how and when to stomp on the d-pedals, though, and it's in these moments that Christiana really shine. They have mastered the routine of soft/loud pretty well, but the quieter parts drag and threaten to put this late night reviewer into la-la land. By the time the straight ballad "Diamonds" ends, it's time to tune out and drift off. Jason Schreurs

STEPHEN CLAIR -- *Little Radio* (www.stephenclair.com) Torturous acoustic rock from this New York singer/songwriter. Put on a set of industrial earplugs, crank up *Little Radio*, and strain really hard to hear it; you may just fool yourself into thinking this is the new Paul Westerberg record. Without appropriate muffling measures, you are sure to receive a painful, slow death courtesy of terrible music. - Jason Schreurs

CLEVER HANS - *Radio Ready* (Cleverhangmusic.com) First of all, Clever Hans has made a good, solid CD. Second, a little advice to DIY bands. I understand that money's tight, but at least type out or print neatly the band's name and song titles. I realize this was a rush job (no complaints about the music), but take a few minutes to make understandable (I'm not one to talk, my hand writing leaves something to be desired). Ok, on to the music. Five songs that are clever, tight, and melodic. Like Shades Apart, Clever Hang's music almost defines categorization. "Rock Star" is pretty self-explanatory, complete with wise-ass, ironic lyrics about 'superstar rockers' (BonJovi would fit quite nicely here). They can also tell a meaningful tale ("Stories"), and not get overly dramatic about it. "She Does it Everytime," and "Don't Go," show-off the bands harmonies and musical muscle respectively. Clever Hans are going to release a proper CD soon, so definitely check it out! - Phil Rainone

CLOSET MONSTER - *Killed the Radio Star* (Underground Operations, PO Box 13, Ajax, ON, L1S 3C2, Canada) Think Canadian political pop punk and, of course, the first band that comes to mind is Winnipeg's Propagandhi. Well, yes, Ontario's Closet Monster are heavily influenced by them and other like-minded bands, but tend to tread on more snotty territory, similar to early Dillinger Four or later NOFX. Of course, with song names like "Corporate Media Death Squad," "Sexism Is Real: Wrestling Is Not" and "The Anti-Racist Sing-a-long," it's pretty clear what to expect lyrically, and their equality agenda is spelled out via punk aesthetic in the extensive liner notes. Energy is the key here as all four members trade off on vocals and often gang-vocal the choruses. The music gets stuck on a treadmill of repetition and the lyrics come off as sloganeering, but their hearts are in the right place and the tunes are enjoyable. Even the straight power ballad, "Melody's Song," a potential disaster for this type of band, comes off without a hitch. Fans of pop punk with a conscience should dig heavily on Closet Monster. — Jason Schreurs

ALEXANDER COCKBURN - *Beating the Devil: The Incendiary Rants of Alexander Cockburn* (Alternative Tentacles/AK Press): Give the man credit for range - within the first ten minutes of this spoken-word CD, longtime-*Village Voice* columnist and author Alexander Cockburn manages to criticize sacred cows from William Shakespeare to Teddy Roosevelt. He just keeps going from there, concentrating on the drug war (a favorite target of his newsletter, *Counterpunch*), the impact of the Battle in Seattle, and, in a masterful closing speech, on whether anything good can come out of the tragedy of 9/11. His answer - a qualified yes - is inspiring. His suggested answer to a ruling class bent on using that crime to bring on more militarism, killing, and repression is even better: "Your system is calculated to engender barbarism and barbarism is what you got and you're going to fight it with more barbarism. We stand aside from that." I couldn't have said it better myself. - Shawn Setaro

COFFINBERRY - 7-inch EP (Exit Stencil Recordings, POB 110775,Cleveland, OH 44111) A very cool single (that turns at 45 RPM's on your turntable)with a variety of styles. Catchy glam, garage, and punk with melodic vocals. Three songs ("The Spins," "Cry Wolf," & "A Minor") are a unique synthesis of intricate guitar work and a driving rhythm section. This is the first vinyl record I've seen in a while. (I guess I've got a soft spot in my heart, but there's something warm and fuzzy about a 45 single). It takes a band with a lot of balls to put out their music on vinyl these days. The music is definitely on the money, and you'll be digging out your parent's record players to check this one out! - Phil Rainone

COHEED AND CAMBRIA *The Second Stage Turbine Blade* (Equal Vision, PO Box 14, Hudson, NY, 12534) - Here's a good example of a really cool idea that is just not backed up by a good enough band. Coheed and Cambria have created a science-fiction concept album about the characters from which they took their band name. Certain aspects of the band really lend themselves to this theme, such as the proggier moments, the torrid synthesizer action and the Geddy Lee geek vocals. It's when this band slips into the dullard world of emo-pop that things take a hard tumble, as if the band was anxious about going all out with their sci-fi leanings. It will be interesting to follow Coheed and Cambria and see how far they will take their curious ideas, but they could easily end up as another one of those annoying emo bands sandwiched between cola commercials on MTV. – Jason Schreurs

THE COLOR GUARD - *Speech For Heated Hearts* (Suziblade Music, 550 Grand Street, 3rd Floor, Brooklyn, NY 11211, www.thecolorguard.com) NYC's cultural revolution, to my eyes, consists of a bushel of 20-somethings juggling disposable incomes, asymmetrical hairdos, and lazily co-opted new/no-wave tropes. Despite all appearances (and media come shots that tell you otherwise), at the end of the day these great pretenders pull nothing off, really, besides their godawful aviator shades. The Color Guard - drowning in this inept zeitgeist - are but another symptom of a soulless pantomime, playing effortlessly forgettable (but newly dressed-up) female-fronted college rock with flatly uninspired vocals, pointless lyrics, and guitar parts that shoot for a Sleater- Kinney lilt but lack the urgency. Most embarrassingly, Speech For Heated Hearts, which sputters more than a fucked-up pigeon who just lost the desire to live, ends on a completely ill-wrought drum solo (the ends not justified by the means): there's no way the band should partake in such rock excess, a they never actually ROCK, but as paying members of a media whitewash, maybe they feel entitled to the tropes of 'rocking out' because that's what kids our age in Brooklyn do, even if what they're doing is as stale, limp, and tasteless as the mullet-wearing crackers right now standing on the corner outside my window. -Brandon Stosuy

THE CONTROL – "The Forgotten" EP (Go-kart Records, Po Box 20, Prince Street, Station, NYC 10012, www.the-control.com) The Control are a straightforward Buffalo-based hardcore band fixated on pick slides, cliched politics, and Youth-of-Today group shouts. Actually, I thought about Youth of Today a couple times during the 6 minute EP (*6 minutes*? maybe a 7-inch would've made more sense?), but The Control's gravelly voiced vocalist sounds less like Cookie Monster than Ray Cappo did. -Brandon Stosuy

THE CONVERSATION - *Last In Line* (Dead Letter Records, PO Box 17882, St Paul MN 55117) At The Drive In may have put El Paso on the musical map, but The Conversation provides ample evidence that there's more going on back in Texas than jittery Fugazi ripoffs with big hair. Three electric guitars jangle, chime, and clang like a punkier R.E.M. while singer Jared Putnam's flat vowels and emo-y crescendos suggest the Midwestern melodicism of The Promise Ring (or the sugary poppiness of Brooklyn's Jets To Brazil) rather than the more aggressive hardcore-punk sound of At The Drive In and post-ATDI group Sparta. While most of the songs here dwell on the typical preoccupations of post-adolescents (girls, the future, girls, relationships, girls), tracks like "After School Special," "In The Middle" and "I'm Sorry Anyway" transform Putnam's yearnings into elegant combinations of soaring choruses, witty verses, and sonic guitars, as elegantly (and unabashedly) romantic as U2. And as for their DIY factor, these guys left school and day jobs behind a long time ago; they're currently on a self-booked cross-country tour that will keep them on the road until Christmas. Visit www.ilovetheconversation.com and catch them if they come through your town. For fans of jangly, heartfelt, melodic rock, this is one Conversation that won't leave you hanging. – Jim Testa

CRAW – *Bodies for Strontium 90* (Hydra Head) – This requires two separate reviews: One review for a world that includes The Jesus Lizard in its history books, and another review for one that does not. First, the non-Jesus Lizard review: Craw play quirky, inventive, challenging music. Vocalist Joe McTigh sounds like a drunken pirate with a carrot up his ass, spouting and spewing the oddest lyrics heard in a coon's age. The rhythm section is tight and precise, leaving room for the guitarist to deviate a little from the normal riff-riffery. "Bodies for Strontium 90" is an inventive, frightful listen, thoroughly enjoyable in a bad nightmare sort of way. Okay, now the review including The Jesus Lizard: The Jesus Lizard lives! Those still mourning the death of the Chicago masters of quirk-core will cream over the latest from Cleveland's Craw; a masterful Lizard-alike release that will have David Yow considering a copyright infringement lawsuit. – Jason Schreurs

CREEPER LAGOON - *Remember the Future* (Arena Rock Recording, 242 Wythe Ave. Studio 6, Brooklyn, NY 11211) Creeper Lagoon's serene, dreamy pop was somehow captured on *Remember the Future* for only 350 dollars. This is a band that clearly knows how to spend their money, for these five songs are warm and majestic in their scope. Beautiful piano accents the delicate "The Way it Goes" while Sharky Laguana's dry voice conveys a wealth of emotion, often exploring themes of loss and sadness, as best heard on "So Little to Give". Yet, while the tone here may be sorrowful, the band is musically energizing, particularly the splash of fuzzy guitar which highlights "There's a New Girl", which elevates Creeper Lagoon above the generic, pre-packaged stylings usually equated with bands who choose to make heart-wrenching ideas their fulcrum. The hazy, atmospheric vocals of "Crisis" combine with a lush pop hook to make it the best of the lot here, yet surprisingly, this track was also the most commercial. I was extremely impressed with this and considering the band nearly completely faded away less than two years ago, it is a very deserved welcome back. - Rich Quinlan

CRÈME BLUSH - *Basket of Bets* (Static Shock) 5 songs that are in the musical vein of Kraftwerk, Gary Numan, and a little bit of Blondie (Debra Harry vocals). The music leans more toward club music, but it still has it's merits. The bad thing about it is, the music doesn't have much substance or motivation. Nice try, but no brass ring. - Phil Rainone

CRETA BOURZIA - *1002* (Porcelain Productions) Ok, the story goes like this, I was late arriving at a local punk house show so missed the first band who I hadn't heard of anyway so, as a result, wasn't that perturbed at the time. As I waited for the the next band to set up I ran into an old friend who I hadn't seenin ages. Well, this particular gentlemen and I had spent many a long afternoon engaged in furious discourse over our mutual and not so mutual musical loves. So, somewhat knowing my tastes in music, he gave me an extra copy of the mysterious opening bands' CD that he picked up and told me that they'd blow me away. I thanked him and enjoyed the rest of the show. The next day when I popped said CD in for a listen I was floored instantly. I was now VERY perturbed that I had been late the previous evening. Such passion, such power, such intelligence; I was hooked. These guys create a post-punk, hardcore, math-y stew here that just rocks like a motherfucker even when engaged in prog-ish time changes and such. Think Refued circa "The Shape of Punk to Come" without ripping the Refused off in any way. 3rd song "Capsized", with it's opening *a capella* shout of "What the fuck am I supposed to do!?!" and subsequent riotous frenzy is worth the price of this hunk of plastic alone! These guys are helping to further advance the art or rock n' roll as we wallow in the infancy of this new millennium. I'm awed and I know I certainly won't miss the next show they play in my hometown. I think you should email these guys at cretabourzia@hotmail.com and beg them to let you buy a copy of this. Look out for Creta Bourzia in the near future, I expect good things. - Eric Walls

CRIMSON SWEET - *Livin' in Strut* (Crimson Sweet) A three piece band from NYC (Al/drums, Polly/guitar & vocals, & Robbie/bass), that creates a thunderous noise! The songs are full of cool hooks ("Hello New York," "California Split," "White Heart," etc.), lines (""Let me sleep forever with the radio on"), and no sinkers (pardon the pun). I don't usually get into production, but on "Livin' in Strut" it's just the right mix of dark, punk angst and just enough brightness to let the lightning hot hooks catch fire. Crimson Sweet are one of those bands that once you hear their CD, you gotta check out their live show. - Phil Rainone

CROC SHOP – *World* (Metropolis) Remember when Electronica was going to take over popular music? The revolution stalled somewhere, and the 21^{st} Century still finds that the vast majority of listeners prefer music made by humans over the synthesized beeps and boops of Techno. Croc Shop, who have been blending live instrumentation with electronics, industrial, and goth for 15 years, offers a middle ground. Formerly known as Crocodile Shop, the group started out as a moody, guitar-based rock ensemble reminiscent of the Chameleons. Somewhere over the last decade and a half, frontman Mick Hale traded in his Rickenbacker for a computer keyboard; and now, with co-conspirators vMarkus and Len9, Croc Shop makes subversive electronic music that retains the Grand Guignol drama of industrial, the dark emotions of goth, and the verse/chorus/verse song structures of rock. The band functions completely DIY, using iMacs and email to create music with members living in three different cities (and two different countries.) The result – their fourth full-length for techno label Metropolis, and their sixth album overall - is a potent combination of synthesized notes, churning dance rhythms (Len9 plays live percussion which combines with computer-generated beats,) new-wave melodies, and Hale 'fs forbidding, heavily distorted vocals. It 'fs fascism at 128 bpm, a grandly dramatic soundtrack to Armageddon that plays as well in a disco as a rock club. From the sinewy, sensuous synthpop of 'gBlackout 'h and 'gGone 'h to the darkly industrial *sturm und drang* of Fleshfield 'fs 'gGeneration 'h remix, Croc Shop 'fs latest should appeal to the digital fan looking for another fix of the band 'fs trademark electronic angst as well as to the more casual techno enthusiast just looking for some hot dance beats. () – Jim Testa

THE CURSE (Hell Bent Records, PO BOX 1529, Pt. Pleasant Beach , NJ 08742) Philadelphia 'fs The Curse retain a somewhat layered, hyper harmonic and aggressive hardcore assault that bears ominous resemblance to Kid Dynamite, the once dominant authority on melodic hardcore in that town. So similar are both the musical nuances and shrill vocal work on this record by the Curse to the aforementioned band that comparisons can 'ft help but be drawn between the two, with the Curse ultimately coming off as a somewhat second rate, less elaborate and polished version of Dr. Dan Yemin 'fs sophomore project. By no means wholly lackluster, though, a stalwart proliferation of structured hooks, sing/scream alongs, and fair tempo shifts can be found herein. All in all, the musicianship certainly holds its own, with a decent array of rousing sing-along material surfacing on these six fleeting numbers. Still, once cannot shake off that uncanny and haunting resemblance, and for this band to rid themselves of that imposing shadow, an original elaboration and improvement upon the groundwork lain on this debut will hopefully manifest itself in the near future. –Mike Ramek

CYST- *Concussion Symphony* (Hook n Mouth Records, P. O. Box 1050, Boynton Beach, FL 33425-1050). Holy shit! The Metal scene has needed an album like this for a long time. Combining elements of 80's Thrash and Speed Metal, plus their unique brand of high and low-pitch vocals, this album shreds for beginning to end. You know they are not fuckin' around as soon as you hit play on the CD player. The opener "Curse the Fates" kicks your ass with its blast-beat assault and furious guitar work. The album stays at a constant high-octane pace with little breaks here and there, but only to pick you up again and bash your head in with incredible speed. The layout is very original and the lyrics are a bit above what you would expect from a Metal band. Songs like "Inhuman", "The Deterioration of the American Psyche", and the signature song "Syst" show the sheer brutality of this band. Uncompromisingly fast, very precise, and full of hooks. A Headbanger's long-awaited dream come true. – Phil Pinto

THE DAGDA (Control, POB 6591, Dun Laoghaire CO Dublin Ireland) Crust-singed tumult hemorrhaging a spectrum of stylistic inclinations, from distinctive downtrodden His Hero Is Gone-esque feedback soaked tirades, to a host of comparatively intricate, echoing melodic interplay schemes is found on this towering force of a record. An especially proficient display of wonderfully channeled, gritty harmonic resonance intertwined into the sprawling deluge of sound herein adds a unique angle to the gloom-laced cacophony. This is dramatic and powerful hardcore punk at its most unmitigated and uninhibited, reeking of impassioned, wild tempo shifts, dark, whirlwind musicianship, and a loose, combative feel throughout. Take heed. -Mike Ramek

DAMONE - *From the Attic* (RCA) The next time I hear someone bitch and moan about female-fronted punk bands (especially Steve & Sean from the Crew), that they "Sound too wimpy," I will personally send you (well, not really), Damone's CD. If you don't already own one of their Cd's, go to the record store (yes, the record store, not the computer), and find one of their recording and prepare to saturate yourself with a sound that is both focused and frenzied! "Frustrated, Unnoticed" lights up the disc as the fireball female lead singer (names not given), bitches and moans about jobs, guys, and life in general. From there, the songs veer between sizzling ("Your Girlfriends"), and sensuous ("On My Mind"),. Either way the music is harmony-driven pop punk, and totally infectious! Damone are one of the featured bands in this years Surf & skate Fest in Asbury Park, April 25,26,27. - Phil Rainone

DANZIG - *777: I Luciferl* (Spitfire Records) Imagine my disappointment when I saw Danzig on tour for his 1988 eponymous blues-metal masterpiece, only to discover what I imagined being an evil, hulking behemoth was actually a very tiny dude with lots of muscles to accommodate for his little man complex. I spent the whole show trying to get a glimpse over the heads in front of me at a floating set of sideburns on stage. Ah, but that first Danzig album was essential. On the former Misfits leader's seventh album, *777: I Luciferl*, we find Danzig desperate to regain some of his past glory after dipping into places he had no business going on previous albums. Places like industrial, goth, dark ambient or any genre that wasn't blues-drenched metal rock. I hate to break it to the Evil Elvis, but it's not 1988 anymore, and these songs don't even have '88 chops. I do believe it's time to hang up the tattoos and chest hair. – Jason Schreurs

THE DAO SON FOR (Country Club Records) An interesting, unique blend of 90s indie pop and 80s synth-lounge music. It has the kind of nerd-pop sound in many respects, you know those bands with the thick horn-rimmed glasses, the gasoline attendant jackets, and the near-shaved heads? It also has a thicker sound, though, due to the judicious use of synth to create a mood that sometimes complements, sometimes jousts with, the rest of the band. While this sounds like a strange combo, it really works, and it works well. "Silent Weapons for Quiet Wars," the fifth track on the disc, is a particular stand-out, as it bounces back and forth between quiet, synth-laden lounge-pop and heavy math-funk lines. "The Drawler" is an all instrumental track which is alot of fun, with the instruments trading off control of the hooks and lines, but it was too short! While there are other stand-outs, too numerous to mention, there's not a bad song in the bunch. Cool. - Paul Silver

DEADWEIGHT - *Half-Wit Anthems* (NUTTSACTOR 5, PO Box 170421, San Francisco, CA 94117, www.deadweightsf.com) Wow, how to describe this? It's heavy, powerful rock and roll, but with a unique twist: violin and cello! It adds a really cool sound that's hard to describe; you just have to hear it. The music is very bouncy as well as being heavy. The vocal style is a cross between the nasal modern pop-punk sound and that of the heavy alt-rock singers. The music is very melodic, very tightly performed. "White Noise" is a standout example of the sound. Once in awhile, I feel like the band is lapsing into an 80s glam sound, but a touch of that here and there can be fun. I can hear a definite Queen influence to much of their music. "Blacj and Grey" is just an awesome tune, a heavy sort of southern rock. Now, normally I hate southern rock, but this is really well done, and those classical strings shine though, sounding right at home. This is a really different, cool disc. Try it. - Paul Silver

DEARLY DEPARTED - *The Remains of Marianne Mayweather* (One Day Savior Records, PO Box 372, Williston Park, NY 11596) If you are looking for a band whose sound encompasses and wraps around you like a thick, woolen blanket on a cold night, seek out Dearly Departed. The EP The Remains of Marianne Mayweather contains four deeply passionate, stunningly melodic songs whose lush, atmospheric ambiance acts as the ideal backdrop to lyrical tales of nostalgia and downtrodden memories. Each of the first three tracks mention rain as a central symbol, as vocalist Mike Mallamo exposes raw emotion with powerful openness and lyrical dexterity, particularly on "Masking Tape for the Broken Hearted," the most compelling of the opening triumvirate. Emoting "When I feel you crying/I feel like moving on (it rips my heart out)", Mallamo and his mates Jeff Bodzer and Ryan Albrecht (guitar) along with drummer Danny Lopez and bassist Joe Rubino absorb you with their ethereal command. The slightly crunchier "The Masquerade" features a more pronounced guitar presence but does not way too broadly from the band's devotion to sharp arrangement, while the gentle bonus instrumental is a perfect bookend to a release that should garner much attention. - Rich Quinlan

DEMINER - *Woes and So's* (Randoman/Johann's Face) Led by former Horace Pinker member Miguel Barron, Deminer follows in that style of friendly guitar punk-pop. The trio, also including guitarist Mat Arluck and drummer Billy Smith, (although Dave Conrad played drums on the record) delivers 11 tracks of speedy, melodic playing that will not raise many eyebrows in terms of being revolutionary; but it is a solid release from a band that seems to have found their brand of smoothly delivered musicianship. Unfortunately, that also meant that the 11 songs seemed to blend into each other without many distinguishing traits. I was a bit concerned after the uninspired opening, "How They Make Dolls in Southern CA", but there were a few efforts that did rise above the predictability, namely "Saddest Chord", the ultra-catchy "17 Years" and the slightly more aggressive "Chicago Ave.". Too often, however, the sugary "Wish I Knew", and "Just Another Dream" represented the general tone of the record and this simply did not hold my attention. I know there are peopleout in the world that will love this, but I am not among them. - Rich Quinlan

Deminer might have its roots in Southern California, but the band certainly should feel right at home in its adopted city of Chicago. There are many echoes here of classic Chicago hardcore bands like Naked Raygun, the Effigies, and the Bhopal Stiffs, from Miguel Barron's hearty vocals to the grinding guitar sound to the infectiously singalong, sometimes Oi!-inspired melodies. Not every track here is a thoroughbred, but there are enough meaty tunes to inspire you to dig out your old combat boots and mosh around the living room a few times. – Jim Testa

DESERT CITY SOUNDTRACK - *Contents of Distraction* (Deep Elm) Originally attracting my attention on The Emo Diaries Six, Desert City Soundtrack produce immaculately detailed and exceptionally dark music. Scenes of Distraction both caresses and pummels the listener, hammering you with sheer guitar violence and strained vocals before evaporating gracefully into moments of unsettled tranquility, accented by the moody beauty of Cory Gray's piano. This is a band which has control over a wide range of emotions, rising and falling as desperate lyrics paint uneasy pictures of life's insecurities. Simon Matt Carrillo is a vocalist to admire, for he strains his vocals to their breaking point before collecting himself, all the while remaining in command of his words that are occasionally harmonious, but more often are disjointed and skewed. The most impressive aspect of the band is the sheer girth of their sound, as the members incorporate hardcore with more ethereal components on tracks such as "What to Do in Case of Fire" and "Sleeperhold," yet still have the ompassion to generate the six minute plus "Murderhearts," a pristine piano-laced effort that appears harmless until its volcanic climaxes. "Cardboard Hill" and "Foglifter" are both beautiful and threatening, a potent musical combination which allowed the band to posses the rarest of musical traits; originality. This may be an awkward ride for some, but unequivocally, Contents of Distraction is worth finding. Check out the freeform noise core of the bonus track as well.-Rich Quinlan

ANI DIFRANCO - *Evolve* (Righteous Babe Records) It's hard to believe that Ani's career has spanned 13 years already. (I think she caught my ear about halfway through.) What's remained constant over the years has been her unique ability to raise questions, and let the listener think and react. Although the music is usually a fiery blend of acoustic folk/punk, recently Ani's added a little more color to her music. On "Evolve" she's taken a new direction, focusing on a five piece jazz and funk band. The songs are still full of Ani's sarcastic 'piss & vinegar' lyrics, and her sobering views on politics, love, and life. She had recently played at the Newport Folk Fest, bringing some new blood to the genre. Long time singer/songwriter/political activist Pete Seeger said he was impressed with her wit and honesty. He was also glad that she 'brought the kids.' - Her devoted fans also got a taste of old school folk music from Seeger, Arlo Guthrie, and a whole slew of openminded artists. - Phil Rainone

DIRTBIKE ANNIE / THE POPSTERS – *The Ellis Island Rendezvous* Split CD (Stardumb Records, P.O. Box 21145, 3001 AC Rotterdam, The Netherlands) I haven't listened to music like this since I was 16 years old. I won't say how old I am, because I wouldn't want that information to effect this review in any way. I will say, however, that I haven't been 16 for about 8 years. And if it was 8 years ago, I might listen to something like this and could possibly even enjoy it. But at this point in my life, that seems pretty much impossible. I will say, though, that both bands here are definitely talented. Dirtbike Annie plays pop punk that kinda has that PG-13 "1-2-3 let's rock and roll, its Saturday night, let's do our best" feel to it. They definitely go for the fun, optimistic vibe. I know that they rock out the Jersey City scene (Uncle Joe's, etc.), which is cool. They probably rock a lot harder live than they do on this cd. Italy's The Popsters are basically D.A.'s high school counterpart band; they're a bit more aggressive, and a bit more punk and less pop. But when it comes down to it, this is also as pop punk as it gets, and probably will not attract many fans over the ago of 17. Although these two bands don't sound exactly alike, they definitely can hang together. At least until this year's battle of the bands. – G S

DIRTY ROTTEN IMBECILS (DRI) - *The Dirty Rotten CD* (Beer City Records) After this CD arrived in my mailbox, I popped it into my CD player. My jaw dropped, but not because this was a tremendous release. It dropped because I can't believe how much of a complete waste of time this re-issue is. Bluntly, it is beyond terrible. A bunch of songs that are so short that they don't develop any resemblance of a musical idea, a vocalist so hideous even a Karaoke crowd would boo him off the stage, a guitarist so sloppy the notes sound like mush, and a drummer so incredibly untalented that you wonder if it isn't a 4 year-old playing upside down Lincoln Log cylinders. The only remotely redeeming value for this CD are the lyrics. They are reasonably well-written, begrudgingly admitted. The track "Money Stinks" includes these lyrics, "Smell the power, smell the health/ smell the poverty of America's wealth/ Money smells of evil, greed/ Capitalist wants and pumped up needs." Typical punk angst, the "us vs. the world" logic is still mildly interesting. Unfortunately, those yrics are preceded by "I stayed at home today/ And I'm not going back to work/ Money stinks/Money stinks/ This city stinks." What city stinks?? It's a poetic device called "concrete details" and these lyrics are severely lacking in them. Pick up a local band's CD, don't waste your time with this re-issue. Seek out the self-titled Twits release on Rotten Records. Seek out Dead Lazlo's Place. Seek out any other band except for this one. This review is not reverse psychology whereby telling you how awful this release is should make you want to go get it. And even mentioning reverse psychology is not meant as a ploy to generate sales of this pathetic release. I sat through this twice. You don't ever need to - - I took my lumps to the realms of taste for you. I could use some good music to listen to to get rid of the pathetic taste this band has left in my mouth. – Paul Hanson

THE DISTRACTIONS - *Calling All Radios* (Dirtnap Records, PO Box 21249, Seattle, WA 98111) I always knew Johnny Rotten had a teenage son and I just found him. He's singing for The Distractions and living in Orange County. The Distractions claim an "old skool" sound but besides Rotten Jr. on the vocals and not much distortion on the guitars, the only "old skool" thing about them is the cowboy hast they wear. And that's not even "old skool", that's just retarded. They also have a song called "Razorblade Kiss" which sounds like something Motley Crue wouldn't write on their worst day. It's almost too funny. - Oliver Lyons

DOGWOOD - *Seismic* (Tooth and Nail Records, PO Box 12698, Seattle, WA 98111) This four-piece play hardcore that is both impressively tight while also daring to explore more intellectual and spiritual themes. The band fearlessly challenges the listener with questions of personal relationships with a deity and inner conflicts without making a band emo record or lowering themselves to antiquated tricks. Rather, vocalist Josh Kemble maintains a steady, forceful delivery even when the band slows the tempo down a bit, such as during the title track or "conscience in a cave". This is proof that power comes from the intensity of your words and not necessarily the speed of your playing. A more gripping example is found with the religious overtones of "Home of Here" and the affirmation of a love for God in "Faith". Normally, such outward devotion would strike me as preaching, but that simply does not occur, for the band hits with such precision, and play with such conviction that you cannot help but be impressed with *Seismic*, regardless of personal convictions. There is a raw honesty that dominates the record and Dogwood do not pretend to have the answers; instead they place the responsibility for improving one's life squarely on the individual's shoulders, while also reiterating the strength that can be found in friendship. ("What Matters", "Last of the Lost") Very engaging from start to finish. - Rich Quinlan

THE DONNAS - *Spend the Night* (Lava/Atlantic) The Donnas sound like they're having a blast (as usual) on their major label debut. They're still rebellious, brash, and love raking a guy over the coals ("Who Invited You," "Too Bad About Your Girl"). Sexy, smart-ass tunes like "Take Me to the Backseat," and "Please Don't Tease," pick up where the Runaways and Ronettes left off. (The Ronettes were one of the first 'Girl Groups' in the 60's. -Heels, miniskirts, makeup, and coolest 'fuck-off' attitude this side of Joan Jett). The limited edition DVD includes Andy Dick interviewing the band, and a cool Donnas cartoon. The Donnas display artistic growth AND kick out the jams on every song. Powerpop-punkrockin,' with unstoppable energy. Be prepared to experience The Donnas if you haven't already! - Phil Rainone

DOUBLETHINK – "Joy Machine" CD-EP (www.doublethinkonline.com) With an average age of 19 or so, Connecticut's Doublethink might look like your typical high-school punk band; but musically, at least, these guys aren't very punk at all. Their sound clearly draws from grunge (melodic verses followed by loud choruses,) as well as alt-rock bands like Smashing Pumpkins and Silverchair who aren't afraid to swing back and forth between hard rock and gentle ballads. Singer/guitarist Scott Brown seems to be channeling Billy Corgan's trademark self-loathing as well as his own post-adolescent angst on the powerful opening track, "Personality," with its pounding riffs and angry chorus ("burn everything down!") "Just For Tonight" and "Easy To Believe" provide a strong dose of testosterone-fueled hard-rock with anthemic singalong choruses, while "Tin Box" finds Brown showing a surprisingly vulnerable side, with its delicate Jeff Buckley-ish falsetto and wounded lyrics. In the same vein, "Someday," while the obligatory acoustic ballad, is neither sappy nor predictable, with lovely backup vocals, delicate piano accompaniment, and Brown's plaintive, yearning chorus of "I'll be a man someday." Buried at the end of the disc is an unlisted bonus track, "Joy Machine," the fastest and hardest-rocking cut on the EP. Although I was impressed by the band's debut EP, Doublethink really blossoms on this disc, with rich, detailed production, powerful guitar sounds from Brown and Tyler Seely, and a rhythm section (bassist Graham Benedict and drummer Jesse McVaney, since replaced by Zach Carta) that locks into a groove with pitbull tenacity. – Jim Testa

DRAGONSPOON (Hook n Mouth Records, P. O. Box 1050, Boynton Beach, FL 33425-1050). This is an album done entirely by one-time FATES WARNING guitarist Frank Aresti. The album combines elements of Electronica and mild Industrial, mixed with "progressive" guitar work and riffs. The album is pretty different and decent for the most part, but his vocals were the only thing that kind of got to me. It sounds like he is trying a little too hard to hit some of his notes. Aside from that, it is an effort worth checking out, even if only to hear what one man can do by himself with a guitar and a computer. – Phil Pinto

DRESSY BESSY - *Little Music* (Kindercore - www.kindercore.com) I usually like music that's lo-fi and I usually like bubblegum-inspired music, but together, the two classifications hurt my ears. It's like Le Tigre took Prozac and completely forgot their agenda. –Darren Paltrowitz

DRIVIN 'f BY - EP (www.drivinby.com) Drivin By have a better than average alt. rock sound. These 4 songs shows that the band has potential. With a little more experience and better production, they could bloom into an amazing band! - Phil Rainone

THE DROPSCIENCE - *Dies Tonight* (Happy Couples Never Last Records, PO Box 36997, Indianapolis In. 46236) This angular release should make a brilliant soundtrack to a darkly complex film, as the playing here is dense, noisy and beautiful in a highly unorthodox style. Beginning with a Hunter S. Thompson sample, it is clear that the members of The Dropscience are interested in exploring ideas and methodologies outside the realm if the mainstream. My favorite moment of *Dies Tonight* arrives.when vocalist Demetrius Antuna repeatedly shouts "you're fucking with a mastermind/Don't fuck with this mastermind". The unnerving intensity and skewed sense of self-importance makes the line both amusing and disturbing, a boundary oft blurred by this act. In "Video Production Still", the listener is asked, "Do you like this?/I'm trying to please your ears/Do you like this?/The sounds I make are perfectly clear". The irony of this is that neither point is true; the band is not here to please the masses nor is their kinetic force and sharp, sardonic lyrics very clear. This is, however, the type of release that should earn this band significant critical acclaim and the respect of those who appreciate the unique. - Rich Quinlan

DRUNK HORSE- *Adult Situations* (Tee Pee Records) Less technical but still similar to Alabama Thunderpussy, Drunk Horse combing elements of AC/DC and ZZ Top and put it all in a Big Black/Jesus Lizard postpunk spin. A song like "Fried Chicken Cadillac" could be Skynyrd were it not for the noisy hand of producer (and Fucking Champ) Tim Green. Yet "The Bitch Is Back" is Chicago post-punk all the way. This is music for those of us who are white trash by choice rather than fate. Cool. - Johnny Puke

THE EARLY NOVEMBER – "For All of This" EP (Drive -Thru Records) The Early November were one of the new bands that caught our crew's (Steve, Tim & myself) attention on this year's Warped Tour. The New Jersey-based foursome invigorated the Drive-Thru Stage, and had the kids stirring up a cloud of dust moshing to this emo-rock band. On their new EP, the listener can expect more of the same high energy, along with some impressive, introspective songs. "Every Night's Another Story" & "All We Ever Needed" live up to the expectations the band promised in their live set. You can also get an acoustic version of this disc at the Drive -Thru Records website. - Phil Rainone

ECHOBOY – *Giraffe* (Mute)Though Noel Gallagher may have been counting on Echoboy's (Richard Warren's) new-found pop-sensibility when he asked him join Oasis three years ago, we can be sure that he didn't bet on Warren having the gall to turn down one of the biggest rock bands in Britain. Thankfully, Warren eschewed the Gallagher circus to remain on his own, and with his latest full-length offering, *Giraffe*, Echoboy demonstrates a blossoming songcraft that more then justifies his been-there-down-that poise. This, his third solo record after the destruction of his former band, The Hybrids, finds Warren in full command of his prodigious talent – a talent that flirts as easily with Nine Inch Nails-esque industrial nihilism ("Wasted Spaces") as it does with New Order dance anthems ("Automatic Eyes"). Having a godfather like Flood (U2, The Smashing Pumpkins) on board as producer and mixer doesn't hurt either. *Giraffe* is filled to the brim with keyboards, acoustic and electric guitars, pounding house beats, and wave after wave of synths, but Warren and his sidekick never let all those hummable melodies get lost in the clutter. One can imagine a club full of ravers pumping their fists to the first single, "Automatic Eyes," as easily as one can picture some kid all alone in his room filling his lungs with the tune's haunting chorus. The more recognizably "techno" feel of his first two LPs, *Volume 1* and *Volume 2*, has been dropped for a distinct breed of pop that recalls Joy Division as much as it does the Prodigy. *Giraffe* evokes the aura of the 80s without ever sounding overly sentimental or nostalgic. "Don't Destroy Me" is a disturbing meditation on memory and solitude buoyed by ambient synths and Warren's overripe beats, while "Summer Rhythm" bleeds the singer's self-doubt out into a brilliant guitar line that's as funky as it is unexpected. And on "Good on T.V.," Warren explains why the Oasis gig wouldn't ever have worked when he says, "All that we can do is sit and wait/For the money to accumulate/But it's never gonna happen to me/Because I don't look good on T.V." – a line that proves Warren knows where his true gifts lie. The only static in Echoboy's transmission is his voice. While his music never looks back, Warren's pipes just seem overwhelmed by his own creations. The poor guy often sounds like he's singing 10 feet away from the mic while the synths explode around him. Still, *Giraffe* is a wonderfully self-assured collection of pop, and a testament to the all the power that lies in giving techno a human face. - John MacDonald

Doublethink

EDEN MAINE – *The Treachery Fact* (Ignition, 1 Chandos Rd., Turnbridge Wells, Kent, TN1 2NY, UK) – Yes, this UK band have got an unhealthy obsession with the North American metalcore scene. They specifically flew Kurt Ballou (Converge, et al) over to produce this EP and hired the same artist that did that tacky cover art on the last Grade record. Despite their doe-eyed glances in our direction, these five songs smoke most of the annoying Western metalcore pests out of their hives. Eden Maine use impressive vocals, tech drumming, wall of sound guitars and some tasty bass work to nail an original, heart-pounding version of an exhausted genre. Vocalist Adam Symonds is an example of someone who can go beyond the monotone screams of the bulk of metalcore yellers, often changing it up with nice banshee howls and an emotive drawl; but he can also scream with the best of them. "Cold Light" storms out of the gate with such ferocity and determination, it gets my vote for best metalcore song of this year. The Treachery Fact is a startling debut EP from a band that will hopefully be turning heads for some timeto come. – Jason Schreurs

EE – *For 100 We Try Harder* (Asian Man Records, PO Box 35585, Monte Sereno, CA, 95030) Members of Seam, Korea Girl and Total Shutdown have come together in EE to create some improvised melodic sounds. Mellower than any of the players' other bands, EE create a relaxing atmosphere for those long baths or late night walks. The songs tend to be a little melancholy and depressing; but they're done with talent and integrity. Fans of Seam will no doubt consider this their missing album or, at the very least, will be stoked to hear even more material from the multitalented Soo Young Park. – Jason Schreurs

EL GUAPO - *Fake French* (Dischord) This is one disc that will allow you to indulge in your love of the bizarre and the bands that shatter predictability. From pure dance pop tinged with a slightly menacing undertone ("Just Don't Know"), to the nearly Beach Boys-style vocal arrangement of "Space Tourist", El Guapo is a band that may leave you a little confused, but you will be wildly entertained. There was something hypnotic about *Fake French*, as the band injected dance tempos with arty, atmospheric effects that carved an entirely new sound, such as "The Time: Night" or the carnival-like anthem "I Don't Care", a song that would serve well as the soundtrack to the world's most evil clown or the unbridled noisy fun of "Justin Destroyer" and "Pick It Up". Picking up where trailblazers such as Devo and Suicide left off, El Guapo is a must addition to your collection. You would be wish to follow the band's advise on "Underground", when they sternly warn, "Don't underestimate the underground". Do not question, just follow, it's worth it. - Rich Quinlan

ELEFANT (Kemado/Palm, 601 W. 26th Street, 11th Floor, New York NY 10001) Yet another band who seems to think that life, fashion and music were all better in the early-eighties. The music itself is charming and pleasing on the ears and the musicianship is there, this CD is a keeper. But listening to this in the daylight is not recommended. –Darren Paltrowitz

END ON END - *Why Evolve When We Can Go Sideways?* (Substandard Records, PO BOX 310, Berkeley, CA 94701) Though a tributary nod to the enigmatic Rites Of Spring is always favorable (in this case exhibited far more in this band's namesake than their sound), the melodic screech and croon progression unveiled by End On End in this, their third outing, still fails to enliven its all too standard, well-trodden format, and thus the output here is ultimately quite mediocre. Yowls, howls and growls abound, set to the solid, angular melodic interplay here conjures up intermittent memories of a literal slew of comparable acts that have surfaced over the past few years. This record's title is all too prophetic, as despite that aforementioned, coveted, oh-so-fashionable stylistic slant, the band fails to hit the mark where the comparatively better purveyors of this feel have (Planes Mistaken For Stars, being a fairly solid example of this). In the end, the musical passages here, rife with tempo-shifting machinations and 'emotive' outbursts, seem glaringly tame and remarkably uninventive. There is nothing wrong with the sounds or styles displayed on this record, but a general unremarkable, thoroughly drab and deflated feel seems to plague this outing from the get go. - Mike Ramek

THE ERGS – "The Ben Kweller EP" (The Ergs, 11 Mercury Circle South, Amboy, NJ 08879) Pop-punk from NJ kids. This stuff is really good and the song about Ben Kweller is sweetly reminiscent of a young Ben Lee crooning about an old Evan Dando. You also get your tunes about girls, murder and swimming. What more do you want for your five bucks!?! – Oliver Lyons

THE EVOKA PROJECT – "December Drive" EP (AudioLab Records, Box 15742, Winston-Salem NC 27113) Better minds than I have chosen the Evoka Project for big, BIG things, but the Reverend just doesn't hear it, boys and girls. The six songs on the band's "December Drive" EP seem to represent an FM radio consultant's idea of "modern rock," derivative and broadcast-friendly with shallow vibes and as much originality as an American Idol contestant. Take one part U2, throw in a little Britpop, some Creed-styled posturing and a healthy dose of arena-rock histrionics, say the magic words – marketing opportunity – and you have the next big media sensation! Produced by Ted Comerford and mixed by high-stakes playas Lou Giordano (Goo Goo Dolls) and Mitch Easter (R.E.M.), the Evoka Project's EP is a musical resume banging on the door of the corporate star-making machine. – Rev. Keith A. Gordon

EYES OF AUTUMN - Hello (Fifty-Four Forty or Fight! Po Box 1601 Acme, MI. 49610-1601) Noisy folk-rock from three guys barely out of if high school (the drummer graduates this June). Meandering, off-kilter anthems dominate Hello, as "Fire Creates Like Machine," and "The Air is Concrete and Hard to Breathe" are rambling, somewhat disjointed tracks that pop and strum, finding a sense of direction from general chaos. "Cordially Yours" captures this spirit, as a melodious vocal delivery and guitar tone seem to be on an entirely different page from the rhythm section. While this was not ultimately for me, the band's sense of unbridled experimentation must be commended, whether it is the yearning remembrances of "As A Child" or the thicker tones of "Warm Cheeks, Cold Hands," Eyes of Autumn play with a daring enthusiasm that incorporate rock, folk and jazzy timing into a myriad of aural concoctions. "Warm Cheeks" held my attention more than any others, for its rugged, abrasive nature came as a surprise. In the nd, they earned my respect. - Rich Quinlan

F-MINUS - *Wake Up Screaming* (Hellcat Records) Since 1997 F-Minus has been injecting a healthy dose of hardcore punk into a somewhat mediocre music scene. On their new release "Wake Up Screaming," the band is still blowing away the whinny, drab, emo bands like Dashboard Confessional, etc. This disc pumps some needed adrenaline into the listeners blood system. Songs like "Survival," "The Mind," and "Wake Up," assault the senses like a wake up call! I'm not a huge fan of hardcore (you lose me when the vocals start to sound like a dog barking), but F-Minus has just the right balance of rage and heartfelt anger. A band that is deeply motivated by what they hear and see, passing it along to the listener. - Phil Rainone

FABLEFACTORY – *Freak Out Hard on You* (Happy Happy Birthday to Me Records www.hhbtm.com) First off, this band has this whole "chicken " image thing going on. Automatically this makes them unoriginal dolts because, as everybody knows, the Mcrackins were the first and only band to co-opt the "chicken" image. So listen up, Fablefactory, change your image. Now down to business. Fablefactory play cutesy rock with a little synth running through the background. It's pleasant enough but nothing very inspiring. Rock harder and maybe I'll start to care. Oh! And ditch those damn chicken costumes! You look ridiculous! – Oliver Lyons

THE FAD (Lo Fi Records, 250 Washington Ave. Suite 1c, Brooklyn, NY 11205) The Fad are one of those garage rock bands who are so good that they're just shaming the more popular bands (Vines, Strokes) to death. So check this out and see for yourself. You'll learn more from the 6 songs this 3-piece rock 'n roll band plays than you ever did at school! The Fad are John Laurence (lead vocals/guitar,) Michael Pisano (bass/vocals,) and Anthony DeCarlo (drums.) - Phil Rainone

FAIRWEATHER – "Alaska" EP (Equal Vision Records, PO Box 14, Hudson, NY 12534, www.equalvision.com) Intense, heavy, yet melodic alternative modern-day emo is the description that comes to mind. This reminds me, in some ways, of some of the great DC forebears this band must have as influences, such as Three, Soulside, Fugazi, Circus Lupus, Ignition, and so on. This is a very tight performance on this 4 track CD. While sometimes it seems a little too professional, a little too slick, overall it's an exciting, rewarding EP. - Paul Silver

FAIRWAY (fairwayband.cjb.net) I don't believe in making allowances; like saying, gee, the guitar playing is really good *for girls*... or, this isn't bad *considering how young the band is*. There's no crying in punk rock; you either cut it or you don't. But hey, c'mon, the four guys in Fairway are *15 years old*. I can't even remember what I was doing at 15 -- picking pimples and jerking off mostly, I guess. I certainly wasn't writing songs, rehearsing, playing gigs, and recording, all the while coping with homework, parents, curfews, girls, not to mention pimples and jerking off... and not even being old enough to drive yet, let alone get into a bar. That said, excuses really aren't necessary; Fairway's music rocks just fine, thank you, although you can tell that the boys' concept of "punk rock" doesn't delve much further into the subject than Blink182, Sum 41, and Saves The Day. But the playing's tight, the drums mesh beautifully with the melodies, the guitar parts are unexpectedly complicated in parts, and the tunes are hummable. What's hard to take is the lead singer's voice, which is that high-pitched emo-boy squeal you hear EVERYWHERE these days (hello, All-American Rejects.) Okay, so he's only 15... maybe his voice hasn't even changed yet. But I suspect he's singing like a castrated choirboy to emulate his role models, and I'd like to suggest that's a bad idea. Lock in him a room with a dozen Bad Religion albums for a week and let's see what happens. *(We got this too late to include in the Demos section, but it is a demo, not a commercial release.)* – Jim Testa

THE FALLEN – *Front Toward Enemy* (Metal Blade) – Hmmm... Metal Blade, production by Bill Metoyer, and a photo collage in the CD booklet. Throw some cold water on my face and tell me it's not 1987. The flashbacks don't stop there; The Fallen have the late '80s thrash metal homage pinpointed, sounding like the 2002 ghostly image of Atrophy, Sacred Reich or School of Violence. Folks who recognize those names will cherish Front Toward Enemy for its hammer-precision double bass drumming, oddball mid-tempo guitar gallop, and underachieving mono-vocals and gang backgrounds. It's hard to say how many heads are going to bang along to these Orange County dudes in the current metal world, where every new release raises the standards for extreme metal. Fans of old thrash will bang their heads and tap their resin-stained fingers, but anyone who has heard Shadows Fall or God Forbid will be underwhelmed by The Fallen. – Jason Schreurs

FEAR OF FRED – *Another Bad Day* (Spin Around Sound Records) Exiled from the NYC/NJ music scene, this humble scribe wouldn't otherwise have heard of Fear Of Fred and *Another Bad Day* if not for the infinite grace and mercy of Mista Testa and his magic package of promo CDs. The band's sophomore effort, *Another Bad Day* is a mighty fine collection of alt-rock tunes drenched with pop hooks and whip-smart melodies, easily appealing to fans of Cheap Trick, Marvelous 3, Weezer, etc. Bill White's fabulously imperfect vocals lend each song a flawed excellence, Chris McGrath's six-string work is razor-sharp and riff happy and the rhythm section of bassist Mark Illiano and drummer Matt McCluskey are as tight as a clenched fist. The band's chemistry is explosive, whether they're recklessly throwing out infectious originals like "She Don't Know" or joyfully revisiting a classic pop gem like "I Think We're Alone Now." A real find by any measure, Fear Of Fred is the sound of a new rock revolution – don't wait for it to steamroll over you, go ahead and check out *Another Bad Day* now. On the web: www.fearoffred.com. – Rev. Keith A. Gordon

FEEDERZ – *Vandalism: Beautiful as a Rock in a Cop's Face* (Broken Rekids, PO Box 460402, San Francisco, CA, 94146-0402) Who actually listens to this kind of shock rock? Sure, some of Feederz' lyrical ideas are good (it's always welcome to hear anti-capitalist leanings from punk bands) but others, such as their advocacy of rape, are just way over the line. Musically, this is a horror show of Dead Kennedys rip-offs and helium-huffing vocals. The album was recorded and mixed by Jack Endino, who obviously is hard up for a little extra green now that his 15 minutes of fame are done. *Vandalism* is a complete mess. "Aborted Jesus," which is barely sung to the tune of "Away in a Manager," is perhaps the worst piece of trash ever committed to tape. – Jason Schreurs

THE FIRST STEP - *Open Hearts and Clear Minds* (Livewire Records, POB 007 , Mendham, NJ 07945) Among the host of stalwart outfits keeping the youth crew spirit alive, North Carolina's The First Step stand tall as one of the most unequivocally powerful and technically sound harbingers of straight edge pandemonium. On the heels of an extremely promising demo, the band has displayed an ability to expand upon the musical parameters around which their sound has been based on their debut EP entitled "Open Hearts and Clear Minds". The EP, featuring an especially elaborate and overtly tight string of builds, breaks, and methodically timed shout-alongs, prompts inevitable comparisons to the out and out unmitigated fury of Chain Of Strength, and the seething melody of classic Unit Pride and Uniform Choice material. Clean, stylistically proficient bursts of layered power ring through from the opening call to arms that is "Something Inside", to the closing, anthemic "The First Step", and a surprisingly refreshing take on a time honored structure and feel is thus accomplished with vitality and energetic drive. Also included on the CD version of this EP is the band's 2001 Demo, and a well preserved live set from CBGB. Those craving spirited straight edge hardcore that is forceful and progressive certainly need look no further. –Mike Ramek

THE FIT – "Gas & Electric" CD EP (thefit@hotmail.com) Wow, there are a lot of Brooklyn bands out there, trying to do something hip and "different". The Fit is another one of them, and they are actually pretty interesting. They seem like they have the ideas and the talent to put out a great album some day. This 4 song e.p. is their second release, and it definitely shows a band that is not afraid to experiment with crazy changes and time signatures; they somehow manage to keep the whole thing relatively upbeat and danceable, which works in their favor. This is mostly credited to their drummer, who carries this entire cd and is pretty much their strongest asset. The songs frantically jump around from part to part. Sometimes, though, it seems like they are trying a little too hard. The combination of parts is sometimes a little awkward; there is enough here to tell, though, that these guys definitely have it in them, and might be a band that stirs things up a couple years down the road, with a little more songwriting experience under their belts. They hav all the elements of the formula under control; the equation just doesn't fit though. And the last song on this cd, "Dollar Dance," is pretty much a disaster. It sounds like 5% of what's good about Faith No More, mixed with 95% of what's awful about the Red Hot Chili Peppers. When I hear it, I picture Sammy Hagar dancing around. I don't exactly know why I had to share that imagery with the wonderful jersey beat readers. But anyway, the 4th song is certifiably unlistenable. I'll pay anybody $1 to listen to that song twice. The bottom line is that these guys are using the freshest ingredients, but something still tastes kinda funny. – G S

FLESH VEHICLE- Double EP (Wreckd'em, POB 100071, Nashville TN 37224) Then-bassist Tom Pappas left Superdrag after Head Trip In Every Key to pursue the Iggy-influenced rock of Flesh Vehicle. While 2000 did see the incredibly-underrated Elastic Prose, 2003 does see the even better Double EP. As the namesake of the CD implies, this is a compilation of recordings from the Vehicle's new lineup. Pappas and crew had previously sounded like a modernized-Stooges or blues swagger-less New York Dolls, but they've now moved into a sound that takes some of that 70's grit and merges it with modernized pop-rock a la Ash. Slower tempos included. –Darren Paltrowitz

FLOOR (No Idea , PO Box 14636, Gainesville, FL, 32604) – It took ten years for this Florida band to release their first full-length, but this is not a sound easily perfected. Floor feature ex-Cavity guitarist Anthony Vialon and it takes about three seconds of "Scimitar" to recognize his patented quicksand riffs. This guy tunes so low his strings must be dragging on the ground, and the production sound reverberates wonderfully under the low-end distortion. The speaker-blowing mud riffs aren't used conventionally; Floor are essentially an emo band with ultra-sludgey riffs. The best moments bring pleasant Engine Kid memories flooding back, and songs like "Return to Zero" and "Night Full of Kicks" are dead ringers for the dearly missed Seattle band. Given the right mood, Floor are the epitome of beautiful simplicity, and they can also rock out hard. It's often a one-trick, almost gimmicky sound and the slow motion pace can wear thin at any given moment, but it is an endeavor that has to be appreciated. The members of Floor need a lot of discipline to play songs this slow and methodical, with a willingness to challenge and tease along the way. – Jason Schreurs

FOO FIGHTERS - *One By One* (RCA - Yeah, you need their address) Before I got this album I'd heard from a horde of people that it was amazing and another horde that it was an immense letdown. I began in the latter category and four listens later I joined the former. "All My Life" and "Times Like These" are incredible singles and unfortunately misrepresentative of One By One. Most of Grohl's writing seems to have been inspired by his time in QOTSA, leaving this to be a full-length that alternates between radio-friendly pop-rock and almost-metal. I'm a fan. –Darren Paltrowitz

FOR AGAINST - *Coalesced* (Wordsonmusic.com) These Nebraskans have been around since '85, but it has taken them 5 years since the last album to get something released. This paints a ethereal landscape with trademark sounding vocals bathed in delicate guitars. This is airy, melodic post rock that's artfully done yet unpretentious. The songs are heartfelt – "Fuel" being a fine ballad, and well crafted. - Tom Brebric

THE FORGOTTEN - *Control Me* (BYO) Solid 80's style melodic three-chord punk – hard/fast/loud, but the production, via Lars Frederiksen, allows the instruments to not drown out the vocals. "Retrofitted" is appropriately titled, with its chorus of "You say I'm a throwback" – maybe so, but if you truly believe in something, so be it. The underlying theme is being yourself and not giving up – even a touch of patriotism thrown in for good measure – surprising for a Bay area punk outfit. – Tom Brebric

The Forms

THE FORMS - *Icarus* (Threespheres, PO BOX 349, Brooklyn, NY 11222; www.threespheres.com) Evoking one of the most half-heartedly dropped myths in the current patois, The Forms wallow and sigh and pass-out all tired like Symbolist Poets gliding through some early Sunny Day Real Estate (sans super-acrobatic vocals, lyrics, and context). The first three songs take up six tracks because, honestly, The Forms ARE arty and, accordingly, each moment gets catalogued as its own entity: tiny fits of incidental strumming - clouds passing or gulls diving or the sound of absinthe dripping through a slotted spoon - are songs. I learned this as a kid by listening to Folkways Records and later via *Metal Machine Music*, Merzbow, and Cock E.S.P., et al. Basically you can walk down the street and hear all kinds of music! People working. Machines whirling. You knew that. I don't know what's going on with The Forms. Why, for instance, is this pallid guy moaning and sighing and screaming so much? And better yet: why the hell is the drummer named Aquaman? Irony hurts my head. There aren't lyrics included (just moody pictures) so I'm unsure of the message (if there is one perched somewhere amid this happenstance). The song titles are all over the place ("Seagull," "Classical," "Stravinsky," "Black Metal"), which is exceedingly unhelpful to my New Critical stance. I guess there's plenty to look at: Photographs of bricks covered in screen-printed birds, the undersides of bridges, an empty street in Brooklyn, the East River and rust, a pre-inked bird print resting in sand. So much about flight! So much about poor hubris-filled Icarus! And the CD is enhanced, offering lots more fucking pictures. So, basically, The Forms are three guys from Brooklyn who sound like they paid Steve Albini to cut the middles sections out of as many Sunny Day Real Estate songs as possible, which makes them kind of like munchkins as opposed to full-on doughnuts. And then they added some pictures. - Brandon Stosuy

KIM FOX - *Return To Planet Earth* (Franklin Castle, POB 404, Redondo Beach CA 90277) Although I never got around to hearing Kim's 1997 release for Dreamworks, I had heard her described previously as "disco-ish." Several listens into Return To Planet Earth I do hear some tendencies towards that genre, but I also hear a singer-songwriter trying to emerge from a shell of layered, synthesized retro-sound. Fortunately this L.A. pop-fest of an album was produced by ex-Size 14 frontman Linus Of Hollywood and features cameos from a lot of notables: Jon Brion, Roger Joseph Manning Jr., Margo Guryan, Probyn Gregory of The Wondermints, Ben Eshbach of The Sugarplastic, Supremium's Rob Klonel and ex-TMBG bassist Hal Craigin. –Darren Paltrowitz

FURTHER SEEMS FOREVER - *How To Start A Fire* (Tooth and Nail Records, Po Box 12698, Seattle, WA 98111) While more renowned for their former vocalist Chris Carrabba (now fronting Dashboard Confessional), Further Seems Forever seems to be one of those great but cursed bands. They are incredibly talented, but too few people know who they are. Hopefully, *How To Start A Fire* will change that, and I believe it should, for there are a variety of styles on display here. The title track is a guitar-saturated effort accented by the vocals of new singer Jason Gleason. Some of the highlights come in the form of the more serene songs, including "A Blank Page Empire", "I Am", "On Legendary" and "Instrumental". Occasionally augmenting their meatier tones with gentle piano, Further Seems Forever is a band that takes chances and refuses to fit into any generic label. People are looking in garages for real rock n' roll; Further Seems Forever prove that it is already out on the streets waiting to be heard. - Rich Quinlan

GERTY - *Sweets From the Minibar* (Eskimo Kiss Records, PO Box 3603, Wilmington, NC 28406) When Gerty is at their best on *Sweets From the Minibar*, there is a warm, throwback sound that rekindles memories of the finest carefree goofiness of New Wave. You can sense this on "Short Drive Home" and "Just One More Time" as the shared vocals of recently married Shirle Hale and David Koslowski are bouncing in between lighthearted keyboards and infectious drum machine generated beats. Despite the heavily mechanized playing, Gerty's strength is the humanity on display by their two central members. Even in the midst of the nearly circus-like music of "Lower Moreland," Shirle Hale sings with heartfelt passion which saves this disc from becoming sickly sweet, disposable pop fare. There is ample guitar and earnest lyrics that also elevate this disc above the aforementioned style. This is not ever going to be in my personal heavy rotation, but Gerty is easily palatable and have a very likable quality to their brand of seemingly harmless pop. When you get beyond the synths, you find that Gerty says more than one might expect. - Rich Quinlan

THE GIFT MACHINE - *Don't Turn Me Off* (Knw Yr Own Records, 1717 Commercial Ave., Anacortes WA 98221) Beginning as a side project for vocalist Dave Matthies, the Gift Machine is a smart act that takes traditional indie pop and adds a little fuzz and hiss into the equation, making Don't Turn Me Off a collection of multi-textured songs that truly shines on the bouncing guitar efforts "Search So Hard (For What To Find)", "Looks Just Like It Sounds" and "Jigsaw Blues." The most intoxicating of the bunch is the laugh out loud funny tale of an eager act struggling for a club gig on "Rock and Roll Debut ", (I Don't want my rock n' roll debut be in a Def Leppard cover band"). Some of the more dissonant anthems, such as "Cool Hand Luke" or "In My Room" are soothing, but a little too reserved for my taste, although there is a subtle sense of intricacy woven within the layers of lo-fi aesthetics. The only noticeable errors came in the form of two instrumentals, "Maya's Friend Ushi" and "A Bad Thing Worse (reprise)." These brief, headspace efforts soud more like after thoughts or incomplete concoctions, and they simply do not enhance the disc. However, "Opa" succeeds without the assistance of lyrics. All in all, The Gift Machine provides an interesting ride along a varied map of pop-rock roads without merely recycling well-tread styles. - Rich Quinlan

GIST - *Art is Now Human* (Red Stapler Records, 6903 Ridgedale Court, McLean VA 22101) An oddly pleasant-sounding DC quartet that remind me of what the Promise Ring would sound like if they rocked it harder. However that pleasantness soons leads to irritation as Gist cannot write a song less than five minutes long. Speed it and you boys will do just fine. - Oliver Lyons

GLENN'S ARMY - *Major Threat* (Irresponsible Records 8 Roger Williams Ct. Portsmouth, RI 02871) Kinda pop-ish, kinda street, kinda "Wimpy-era" Queers sounding punk from three young Rhode Island kids. Nothing really grabbed me on this disc. Maybe one of the members should get a drinking problem so next time they could write more convincing songs about beer. - Oliver Lyons

GOODBYE GIRL FRIDAY – *Mr. And Mrs.* (SUS4 Recordings) A trio comprised of Berklee School alumni Dave Sherman (keyboards) and Dan Grennes (bass) and drummer Andy Sanesi, Goodbye Girl Friday landed in NYC from Boston by way of Nashville, picking up some considerable musical chops along the way. Formed out of the ashes of the acclaimed outfit Edison With The Weather, Goodbye Girl Friday explore a similar sort of artistic groove, throwing jazzbo riffs, avant-garde rock and hipster attitude into the studio blender and pouring out *Mr. And Mrs.*, the band's debut disc. A challenging and often infuriating collection of songs, Goodbye Girl Friday are good at what they do, tho' what they do doesn't really appeal to these ears. Slickly produced and crafted with some skill, *Mr. And Mrs.* is nevertheless too smart for MOR radio and too highbrow for low rent rockers such as the Reverend. – Rev. Keith A. Gordon

THE GOODS - *Saving Sanity* (New High Ct Records, dist. By Theologian;) Energetic and edgy vocally driven rock; catchy songs that are driven by the heartfelt vocals of Kat Hoffman. I liked this mainly for the theme of every relationship being a disaster waiting to happen only to be followed by the next one – gotta love that negative energy. – Tom Brebric

THE GOODWILL – *That Was A Moment* (Negative Progression) After first plucking The June Spirit from the bowels of South Jersey, California's Negative Progression now brings us the darlings of the Long Island scene, The Goodwill. Maybe we could call this P/EMO, a mixture of Pop-Punk's bouncy melodies with Emo's sappy boy/girl lyrics, shoehorned into run-on sentences that don't really mesh with the melodies; to wit, "Girl I'm sorry with my deepest honesty/ And when silence follows, it's a reminder of a mistake I will regret as much as it takes/And do you want our hearts to be torn wide open?/ Isn't it funny how hearts are meant to be broken?" It's bouncy, it's catchy, and I'm sure I'd be digging it more if I was still 15 and crushin' on that cute girl who sits behind me in Algebra… but mostly it's just *Dawson's Creek* teen-romance clichés set to bubble-gum punk. Put another way… Jawbreaker, it ain't. – Jim Testa

GRADE 8 (Lava/Atlantic) Grade 8 may be the suggested age for listeners of this band, as this transcontinental act blends tired metal riffs with hip-hop influenced vocals (particularly "Get It Out", "Let 'Em Know" and "Chances Are"), and begs one to ask the question: how do these bands get signed? Interestingly enough, the disc began with a collection of promising tracks, especially "Brick by Brick" and "Headcase." These two efforts were fueled by a thunderous bassline that should rattle walls, and a crisper lyrical delivery by Ryan Tooker. However, while these tracks had a combustible combination of thick production and NYC hardcore stylings, the majority of the record became too predictable. The potential is here, but these guys need to refine their presentation and focus greater attention on their more unique sounding anthems. -Rich Quinlan

GRANIAN - *Hang Around* (Granian, P.O. Box 26, Holmdel, NJ, 07733-Granian.com) Don't listen to a bossy title! The voice is like a male Cher. Strum-happy, pretentious… Don't get me wrong, there's some real intricate playing here, but yawn… it's too artsy for its own good. I know I'm not supposed to judge the marketing aspects of a release, but I can't help but mention that there's a picture of this Granian dude inside the disc with his eyes closed and his head half-bowled… my first thought was, "Did he put himself to sleep with his own music?" Verdict: Might dazzle the coffeeshop set, but otherwise it comes off as "mature rock." Ehhhh. - Mike Chant

GRAYSON MANOR – *Back To The Rock* (www.bradcoxrocks.com) Some of the guys in the band – which hails from Grayson, Georgia, by the way – handed me this CD at SXSW. Now okay, I'll grant that these guys look, sound, and probably even smell exactly like '88-era Guns N Roses. Throw in a little Aerosmith and a touch of pre-punk glam (ala New York Dolls) and you've got the whole story. On the other hand, the six original songs here really do rock. I don't just mean they're loud or heavy; I'm talking dancing around your bedroom in your underwear ROCK. And isn't not giving a fuck about what's supposed to be cool what punk is supposedly all about? So I'm giving this a thumbs up in the Guilty Pleasure Dept. If I ever showed up at any of the clubs that these shitkickers play down in Georgia, I'd probably get beaten to a pulp. But if they ever tour up around here, I'd thrown on my denim jacket and go check them out. – Jim Testa

HAM STEAK – *I Think Therefore I Ham* (Serendipity Do Da, Pizza Records) This is the one man band of George Hakkila, aka "Ham Steak". I really cant figure out what this is all about. In the liner notes the album is described as "simple nonsense and spectacular hope." I agree with the simple nonsense part. But right now I'm only hoping for someone to put me out of my misery. Most of the lyrics on this home-recorded album are indecipherable, but in the 2nd song I distinctly heard "testicles turn blue." Another song further into the album says "I invented the fart, it was the start, of a beautiful thing." Yet another song repeats the following lyrics for the entirety of the song: "Foo-foo, foo-foo, foo-foo, foo-foo, I pity the fool, I pity the foo-foo." I think in another song he says "Pass the manure," then later in the song he mentions something about having a pimple in his nose. The recording is almost as wretched as the songwriting; it sounds like standard lo-fi 4-track rock, but the acoustic guitars are horrendously out of tune, and there is an extra blanket of fuzzy noise making everything sound distant and low budget. If this was my next door neighbor's basement demo tape, I might think it was weirdly charming...(although I would never leave the front door unlocked again). However, the fact that this is a packaged release on a record label makes me really question the music industry. – G S

HARKONEN – *Shake Harder Boy* (Hydrahead Records, PO Box 990248, Boston, MA, 02199) Not only have Harkonen fine-tuned their assault over the course of the last seven or eight years, they've also managed to loosen up along the way. What results is a piercing but somewhat comforting listen that employs catchy, massive guitar riffs without beating them to death. *Shake Harder Boy* has the epic feel of Neurosis or Isis (especially in the vocals), but also a catchy energy that saves it from being the kind of record that requires the utmost of attention and atmosphere. In other words, Harkonen is equally effective as the background music for your late night walk or the soundtrack to own your personal nervous breakdown. It's their finest moment yet, with each of the successive 11 tracks every good as the last one. Watch for even bigger and better things to come from this amazing band from Tacoma, WA. - Jason Schreurs

HIGH BEAMS – *Hallucination* (Dead Beat Records, P.O. Box 283, Los Angeles CA 90078) Every smart *Jersey Beat* reader has seen it happen dozens of times – a music style or scene bubbles up from the underground, grabs some mainstream attention and sooner or later the suits come sniffing around. They'll offer contracts and tell sweet lies of fame and fortune. By the time the major labels begin exploiting a scene, tho', it's pretty much over. One of the unintended results of this corporate feeding frenzy, however, is that bands like High Beams, formed by ex-Mullens frontman Matt Mayo, often get a well-deserved shot at the brass ring. Now that "garage rock" (or whatever the boys in marketing finally end up calling it) is the flavor du jour, we're seeing musical throwbacks like the Strokes and the White Stripes receiving all sorts of hype. It's all rock & roll to me, and High Beams kick out some righteous jams with *Hallucination*, the band's debut hewing closer to the Dictators and the Dead Boys than to the skinny tie aesthetics of the Hives. High-voltage tuneage like "Lori Looker" or the blues-infused "Tell Somebody" scream to the heavens with crackling riffs and soulful vocals while "Hallucination" sounds like vintage '70s Clevepunk with a shot of Motor City Madness. Graced by the ghosts of Rob Tyner, Fred "Sonic' Smith and Stiv Bators, High Beams deliver the cheap rock & roll thrills we all crave with *Hallucination*. Email 'em at thehighbeams@hotmail.com. – Rev. Keith A. Gordon

THE HOPE CONSPIRACY - *Endnote* (Equal Vision Records, PO Box 14, Hudson, NY 12534) This is magnificent. Incredibly aggressive and pummeling hardcore which is both overwhelmingly personal and brutally honest. The band is a venerable ocean of sound with each song crushing you in waves of relentless force. From the opening brevity of "Departed", The Hope Conspiracy set an intense tone that does not relinquish itself over the course of the following eleven tracks. Brevity is unfortunately the one draw back of this disc as the incredible delivery of this band lasts only a scant thirty minutes. The vicious, guttural, growling vocals rise to crescendos of anguish in the midst of swarming guitars. Themes of death, shattered love and anger abound here as Endnote gives hardcore fans a rush of adrenaline. While the guitar word is impressive, I personally loved the bruising low-end tone taken by the majority of these songs. This is a staggering record and this surely should not be the endnote for The Hope Conspiracy. - Rich Quinlan

SEAN HOPP MEETS THE MEMBRANE CONSPIRACY - *Parables of the Lesser Yogies* (Mathbat Records, 2172 W. Leland #3, Chicago, IL 60625, www.mathbat.com) There is absolutely no way to describe this stuff, no genre label to neatly fit it into. There's music, and there's vocals, but how they're put together defies categorization. Which is a damned fine thing. This is highly original music. Synths are used to provide a darkish atmosphere. The vocals are eerily cold. Guitar/bass/drums round out the sound in sort of an 80s art-punk-goth-electronic sort of thing. Track 10, "Perdurabo," even adds a bit of middle-east & south asian influence to the mix, while maintaining a bare bones approach to orchestration. This is not the typical Jersey Beat indie-pop/alternative rock/pop-punk sort of thing you would expect, but you should be adventurous and explore new things. Try this disc. – Paul Silver

HOT ACTION COP (Lava/Atlantic) People in Tennessee like their white-boy funk like Germans dig David Hasselhoff. How else can you explain Hot Action Cop? The band starts off with "Doom Boom" – an awful Limp Bizkit ripoff with some dropped-D metal breaks thrown in for the frat boys. As unappealing as that sounds, it just gets worse, especially when singer Rob Werthner employs his Commodores-esque soul voice for the album's slower numbers. This music could not be more insulting if the members of Hot Action Cop wore blackface while performing it. – Johnny Puke

HOT HOT HEAT - *Make Up The Breakdown* (Reprise Records) Hot Hot Heat's music has jittery, caffeniated rhythms, and disco grooves (not a bad thing here), that will persuade punk kids to bop 'til they drop! Off-beat and catchy, the music is reminiscent of the Cure, only more upbeat. Ensemble playing with short and sweet songwriting, the wordplay is clever and emotional. At a show I think the kids would be wondering if it was cool or not to dance to these quirky catchy pop songs, but image be damned, it's time o shake a tail feather or two! The footloose organ, bendable guitar chords, create bouncy, hook-laden party music. Definitely an acquired taste, but a needed shot in the arm for punk rock. - Phil Rainone

HOT ROD CIRCUIT - *Been There, Smoked That* (Triple Crown Records) Triple Crown has rereleased the bands original EP, as well as live acoustic recordings, onto this full length disc. Songs like "Very Best Friend," "Blurry 17," and "Understood," all serve up a healthy dose of solid rock (post-punk emo genre). Their sound includes a cool, off-beat, Jane's Addiction wall-of-sound styleThe acoustic live cuts include "Power of Vitamins," "This One's for Randy," and Hi-Tech Lip Gloss." The latter song is fiery, even for an acoustic set. Acoustic or electric, Hot Rod Circuit, puts their heart and soul into every song! - Phil Rainone

HOT SOCKY (www.hotsocky.com) A Lower East Side quartet that tows a fine line between well-produced pop and just the right amount of hard-edgedness to pull it all off without sounding like so much drivel out there. Melodic, hook-profuse lyrics hearken back to a big early 70s rock sound, but without the hedonistic guitar solos. Think of this as the musical equivalent of a finely tuned muscle car. The band knows when to lay back and not overpower a song – an art form often missed these days. A well done first outing. – Tom Brebric

I AM SPOONBENDER – "Shown Actual Size" EP (Gold Standard Laboratories, PO Box 178262, San Diego CA 92177) About a half a decade ago, my band Cletus did a national tour with homo-punk faves Pansy Division, who at the time had a token hetero drummer named Dustin Donaldson. Donaldson resides in San Francisco to this day but moved there from Kalamazoo, where another old band of mine had once gigged with an industrial-metal group that Donaldson drummed in called Thought Industry. Obviously a man adept at many genres, Donaldson now heads I Am Spoonbender, a modern new-wave dance band with sequenced beats and blips galore. Modern recording techniques give all three tracks here booming bass to accent the musical palette of keyboards, telephones, and other electronic doohickeys that otherwise would make this sound like vintage early 80's new-wave. The third track is what today's kids would call chill-out music and is reminiscent of the post-Throbbing Gristle work of Chris and Cosey, particularly the haunting female vocals. – Johnny Puke

ICED EARTH - *Tribute To The Gods* (Century Media). A super metal band records an album filled with songs from other great metal bands. Two songs from KISS, IRON MAIDEN, BLUE OYSTER CULT and AC/DC, and one from BLACK SABBATH, JUDAS PRIEST, and ALICE COOPER round out this tribute. I personally do not understand the need for two BLUE OYSTER CULT tracks on here (nor do I consider them gods!) but hey, to each his own I suppose. I did enjoy all the renditions of the other classic songs contained here though. You won't hear anything too groundbreaking here but if you're a fan of ICED EARTH or of any of the bands covered here, you might want to give it listen. -Phil Pinto

ICONS OF FILTH - *Nostradamnedus* (Go-Kart Records, P. O. Box 20, Prince St. Station, New York, NY 10012). Man, on their Bio it says these guys are legends among underground punks everywhere, but I'm having a hard time seeing that. Don't get me wrong, the album is pretty decent, very raw, very angry, and I like that, but the vocals are horrific. I know they don't have to sound super polished up to be good, but this guy doesn't cut it. If they got a new singer, they would then rule in my underground book, but otherwise, they are just a good band with a crappy singer. --Phil P.

THE IMMORTAL LEE COUNTY KILLERS - *Love is a Charm of Powerful Trouble* (Estrus Records) The band has a 60's blues/rock (Zeppelin, Blue Cheer), sound that also features a gritty slide guitar reminiscent of the Black Crows. They don't break any new ground, but they do saturate the genre to the point of providing some cool, raucous nasty noise. - Phil Rainone

J CHURCH – *Palestine* (Honey Bear Records, 1730 E. Oltorf #135, Austin, TX, 78741) This is a benefit record for J Church/Honey Bear's Lance Hahn, who lost all of his personal and record label belongings in an apartment fire. Good luck raising funds off of *Palestine* though, because it is really, really awful. Originally demo tracks recorded in preparation for a follow-up to J Church's best album, 1997's *The Drama of Alienation*, Hahn decided to add vocals to this collection of muffled, lo-fi duds. Maybe it's the horrible recording and uninspired vocals that kill these songs; with a proper recording this might have been a half-decent album, but alas. *Palestine* is pretty much the nail in the coffin for a band that always had a nasty habit of ignoring quality control. It is a painful, awkward and embarrassing listen. – Jason Schreurs

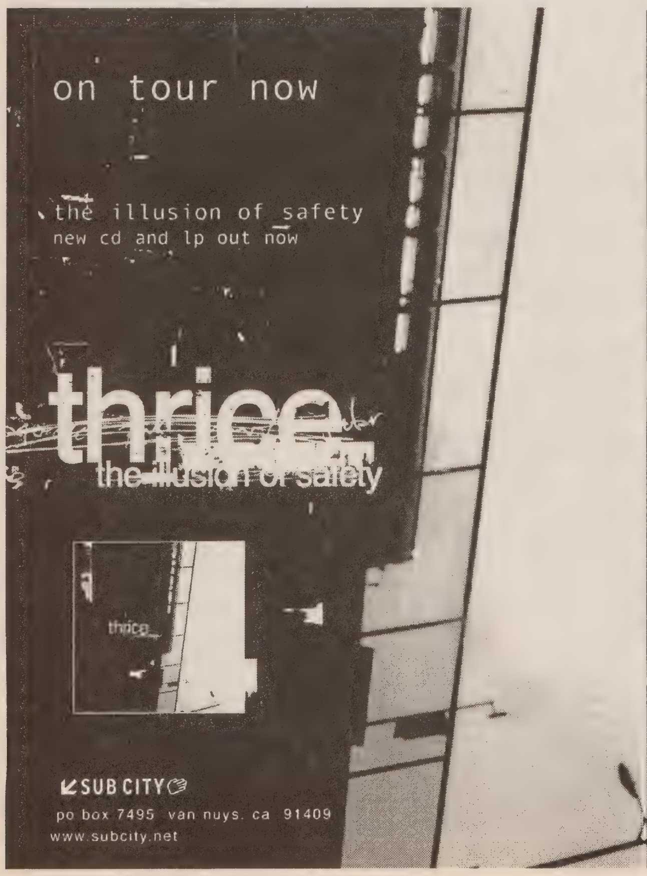
JAWBREAKER – *ETC.* (Blackball Records) Few bands epitomized the punk DIY ideal in the Nineties more than Jawbreaker, a band that toured relentlessly and released three amazing albums on small labels, as well as a slew of 7-inches and compilation tracks. That all came crashing to a halt when the band left the world of indie-rock and signed to DGC/Geffen for the commercially disastrous "Dear You" in 1995. The aftermath of that decision tore the band apart and Geffen remaindered "Dear You" almost immediately, turning it into an instant collector's item on eBay. With singer/guitarist Blake Schwarzenach now enjoying new success with emo darlings Jets To Brazil, and old grudges apparently mended, the band has released a CD of hitherto lost tracks from 7-inches, out-of-print compilations, and album outtakes entitled "ETC." on former drummer Adam Pfahler's Blackball Records. "ETC." spans the band's entire career, from earliest demos to outtakes from "Dear You," including a hitherto-unheard remake of *24-Hour Revenge Therapy*'s scene-shredding anti-anthem, "Boxcar" ("One two three four, who's punk? What's the score?") Along with covers of U2, R.E.M., and the Psychedelic Furs, the tracks here revel in Schwarzenbach's witty wordplay, his distinctively hoarse and playful vocals, and the band's unending musical and rhythmic inventiveness. It's a treasure trove for older fans who already own all the albums but may have missed these nuggets, or the younger listener working backwards and just discovering Jawbreaker for the first time. More good news: Blackball has announced that it will reissue "Dear You" sometime in 2003. - Jim Testa

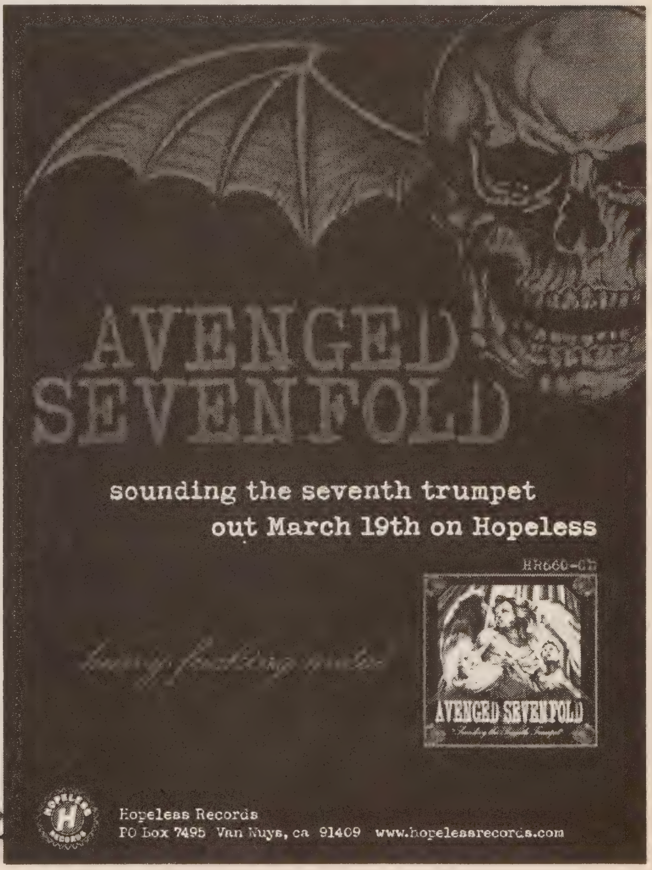
THE JAZZ JUNE - *Better Off Without Air* (Initial Records, Po Box 17131, Louisville, KY 40217) As a fan of the Jazz June, one cannot help but to be filled with a sense of pride for these guys have grown up over the past few releases, and *Better Off Without Air* only continues their incredible development as songwriters with intelligent lyrics and playing that has a sense of focused experimentation. While the majority of the band's early work was jangly, easily digestible pop fare, *Better Off Without Air* has a darker, more complex personality, particularly heard with "Drugs and Models", "These Pills Won't Help You Clam Your Nerves" and the title track. A number of instrumentals complete the evolution of the act thus far, as "Hate/Bass", the fleeting "Shots Fired" and the rousing "Benny Carks Can" are tremendous ideas that simply did not need lyrical accompaniment. Vocalist Andrew Low displays greater vocal range and depth, while the playing of Bryan Gasser, Dan O'Neill and Justin Max will impress both long time fans, and the new admirers this disc will certainly attract. - Rich Quinlan

JESUSEATER – *Step Inside My Death Ray!* (Deathwish Inc. 10 Lothrop St., Beverly, MA, 01915) And the award for most improved band goes to? Jesuseater! Their self-titled EP from last year went in one ear and out the other, hindered by a dull production throb and pedestrian songwriting. Even more surprising then is *Step Inside My Death Ray!* and it's angry, deep groove. Most of the angst comes, naturally, from the seemingly unlimited rage of screamer Shawn Brown (ex-Swiz, Sweetbelly Freakdown, Dag Nasty) and his young Rollins-esque musings. The Armageddon manifesto of "Disappearing Twins" has more venom than pretty much anything ol' Hank has spit out on his last three albums, and Brown's band sometimes sounds like they are struggling a little to keep up with his intensity. They do manage to pull it off, with ten-ton drums, immensely thick guitars and a bass fury equaled only by Helmet's Henry Bogdan in his heyday. One complaint is Brown slips back into his patented somber, mid-tempo laments on occasion, when all we want is for the chaos to continue. Let's hope Jesuseater continue to progress and exercise a little more quality control on album number two, but, really, this is one hell of a ride. – Jason Schreurs

THE JIM YOSHII PILE-UP - *Homemade Drugs* (Abolutely Kosher Records, 1412 10th St., Berkeley, CA 94710, www.absolutelykosher.com) Non-descript, quiet indie-pop music. In some ways it reminds me of what folk-singer Michael Johnson would have sounded like if he had done indie music. It's very quiet, laid-back stuff. As a result, it just kind of fills the background, enveloping the listener in cushy, soft surroundings. There's no surprises, nothing jumps out at you to get you moving, but you do end up feeling warm and cozy. This is a good disc either for a date at home in front of the fireplace with a bottle of wine, or for curling up with a good book on a cold winter day. - Paul Silver

JOAN OF ARC - *So Much Staying Alive and Lovelessness* (Jade Tree Records, 2310 Kennwynn Rd., Wilmington, DE, 19810) Ah, Tim Kinsella, you weirdo. With recent Joan of Arc output relying more and more on the wacky world of technology, it's a complete about-face on *So Much...*, recorded without any computer manipulation. The resulting songs are just as strange and difficult to grasp as Kinsella's Pro-Tools-obsessed works. Kinsella and his collaborators on this album (brother Mike on drums/bass, and guitar/bass duo of Todd Mattei and Sam Zurick) take what could have once been

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basic, stripped-down songs, then add as much oddities to the mix as is possible with piano, tambourines, organs, horns and the like. Soon a two and a half-minute pop song warps into a quirky, six-minute Kinsella self-indulgence. His shivers-down-the-back voice is also frustratingly muted here; and anyone familiar with his groundbreaking work in emo-core band Cap'n Jazz will be hankering for his patented wail, if even just once during this album's 46 minutes. *So Much...* is not a bad album, by any means, but it takes a lot of effort and devotion to get inside of Kinsella's head, and even more to enjoy what's in there enough to stick around. - Jason Schreurs

THE JUNE SPIRIT - *Testing Superstition* () After listening to The June Spirit their music will pull you into their songs. The music is earnest and endearing. These New Jersey boys have been around for a while supporting bands like Descendents and Midtown among others. The vocals and guitars can sweep back and forth from minimalist to enormous. This is a band with depth and focus. Each song has something a little different going for it. The whole disc will perk your interest! - Phil Rainone

JUNCTION 18 - *Heroes from the Future* (Fearless Records, 11783 Goldenwest #545, Westminster, CA 92683, www.fearlessrecords.com) This starts out as a weak alternative rock substitute for pop-punk, and then descends even further into mediocre alternative rock. It sounds like a million other bands out there, trying to imitate a style without adding anything of themselves, any soul. - Paul SIlver

Junction 18 is a powerhouse of a pop/punk band! Music is a powerful thing. It can cheer you up or tear your heart out. It can make you dance or make you you cry. It can be a teacher, motivator, an enemy, or a weapon. A song can make you feel like you've got nothing to live for or it can make you feel like you're on top of the world. For some, it's a reward after a hard day's work. And for others it's the reason to get up in the morning. It's what drives them. It's what makes them happy with their lives. These six songs accomplished all that. - Phil Rainone

KICKEDINTHEHEAD - *Salita* (Resurrection AD, PO BOX 763, Red Bank, NJ 07701) These tepid *emotive* rock stylings prove maddening at times and barely tolerable at others. Lethargic, dry croons, mid-tempo upbeat riffage, and relentlessly uninventive song structures and choruses evoke, a sound and feel that comes off like just about every other syrupy ex-hardcore pop band of this ilk. Sweeping the nation like a plague, swarms of dime-a-dozen •erock out •f bands such as Kickedinthehead offer their two forgettable cents and slick haircuts to the bop-your-head melee. With little end in sight, my advice (as stated many times before) would be to steer clear entirely from this virulent faux-hardcore epidemic. - Mike Ramek

THE KILL PILL – "Outside These City Walls" EP (Uprising Records, Po Box 42259, Philadelphia PA 19104) Looking back to the base origins of socially conscious punk, the Kill Pill play an impressive homage to the MC5, but this has the chops to allow *Outside These City Walls* to be more than just another act looking to sound honest by adopting a retro sound. Here, the Kill Pill is led by vocalist Mani Mostofi, who will inevitably garner comparisons the Hives "Howlin'" Pete (but aren't they all really just angrier versions of Jagger?). Regardless, this 5-song EP is extraordinarily cool, led by the stripped sown brash sound of "Feed My Flame, Starve the Game", a rousing examination of the price of social change, while "Glory Falls" reminded me of the International Noise Conspiracy's "Capitalism Stole My Virginity", for out of chaos came great harmony. "Slow Burn" rages against the inevitable, upcoming war as Mostofi states with nearly a Jello Biafra sense of doom, "In the dawn they are coming to criminalize our decent/ An iron fist asking progress to repent", while his mates, particularly drummer Andy Hurley play with intense fury and precision. Sadly, the disc only lasts five songs, but the finale, "To Walk in the Shoes of the Intifada" is another bustling, politically scathing track both musically and intellectually. While I fear the Kill Pill may be lumped with our bands currently "saving" rock, these guys truly stand on their own. This is exceptional. Find it now! - Rich Quinlan

THE KILLS – "Black Rooster E.P (Dim Mak Records, PO Box 14041, Santa Barbara, CA 93107) The *Black Rooster EP* is gritty, gutty music played by two hardened human beings whose sound ranges from the lo-fi resonance of the Velvet Underground to poppy, Blondie-like anthems. VV and Hotel are rugged looking people and their music reflects their appearances. "Cat Claw", a basic, no frills punk stomper is one of the best, while the title track, highlighted by the lyrics "the kids want to fuck and fight", is surprisingly upbeat in its tempo and aura. "Wait" epitomizes late 60's, psuedo garage folk style and demonstrated yet another side to this incredibly bold duo. However, for my money, the best of the lot came with the roaring cover of Captain Beefheart's "Dropout Boogie". From its "You Really Got Me" stealing riff to its cleverly amusing lyrics, it is an unforgettable effort. The final smile will cross your face as you listen with rapt attention to the closing "Gum", a sultry spoken word track that makes gum chewing sound indescribably sexy. Just go find this. -Rich Quinlan

KISS ME DEADLY - *Travel Light* (Blue Skies Turn Black, 214 Thirnhill, D.D.O., QC, H9G 1P7, Canada) Ww, this is some cool shit! It's emo, it's indie rock, it's swirly pop, it's swirly emo-pop! It's interesting that there's a long list of bands that Kiss Me Deadly claim as influences, not the least of which is Fugazi, but they neglect to list the band that seems to have a big influence, consciously or otherwise -- Mission of Burma. MOB was post-punk before there was such a thing, and this band has alot of that sort of feel to it. It's so hard to pick out the stand-out tracks, as there as so many of them. Highly recommended. - Paul Silver

KNOCKOUT - *Searching for Solid Ground* (Fearless Records) Some bands burst into the public consciousness with flair or brilliance, or simple novelty, and just as quickly disappear. Others- like Knockout for instance, slowly build their sound (check "Breakaway," "Hideout," or "24 Hours," for starters) and identity through hard work and perseverance. Listening to "Searching for Solid Ground," the music leaves the listener wondering, "Where did they come from?" Knockout is a pop/punk band that I think you'll be hearing a lot from! - Phil Rainone

THE KOWALSKIS / THE LULABELLES – "Fresh & Sweet" Split 7-inch EP (Thunderbaby; www.thunderbaby.de) NYC's own Kowalski's team up with the Netherlands' all-girl group the Lulabelles for this nifty EP. It's by-the-numbers grrl punk and I would say it all sounds like the Donnas, except that would be an insult to the Kowalski's (whose Lindsay Anderson, aka Kitty Kowalski, has been doing this since before any of the Donnas had their first training bras.) The Kowalski's "Depression Overdrive" goes for straightahead Ramonesy pop-punk while "I Love You Baby But I Hate Your Friends" (co-written with the Dictators' Adny Shernoff) sounds like a great lost Blondie outtake. The Lulabelles are a bit rougher around the edges, more like the Runaways with fuzzier guitar and rawer production. If you like chicks on punk, you'll like this EP. – Jim Testa

LA MOTTA – (Does Everyone Stare? PO Box 1006, Edison, NJ, 08818) Anyone remember the Asexuals? It might be a Canadian thing, but they were one of the '90s most memorable pop-punk bands (if not only for their name), right alongside fellow Montreal-ers the Doughboys. When the Asexuals called it quits before the new millennium hit, guitarist/singer Sean Friesen went sun searching in California. La Motta picks up where the Asexuals left off, with songs every bit as syrupy as Friesen's previous band. Guest guitars by estranged former Pixie Joey Santiago add a bit of relevance to the otherwise dull sound of La Motta, but this record sinks under its pretentious rock formula a few songs in. Enjoy the sun Sean, there won't be many world tours in your future. - Jason Schreurs

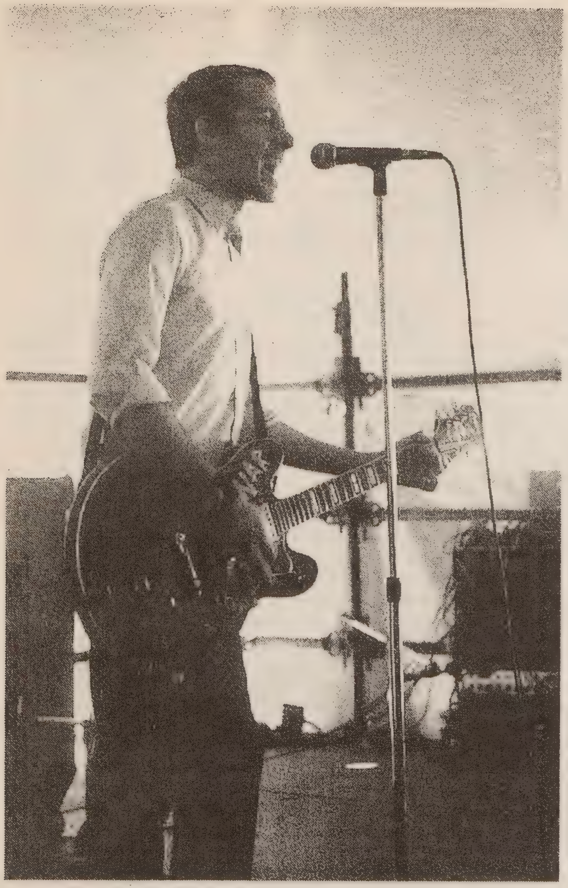
LATTERMAN - *Turn Up The Punk, We'll Be Singing* (Traffic Violation Records, POB 772, East Setauket, NY 11733) With meticulous, sprawling arrangements of bass rumbling melody, a delivery awash in chorus after spirited chorus, and a host of harmonic inclinations, the first full length from Long Island's Latterman is largely successful in creating an uplifting endeavor that, at its best, maintains a strong equilibrium between sugary hooks and stalwart energy. Recalling a host of musical and lyrical influences, from Richmond, Virginia's socially conscious Inquisition to Avail, and the rough-edged fray of East Bay legends Crimpshrine, the lissome lyrical scheme complements its driving auditory counterpart quite well. When the often thick, sprawling concoction of elaborate hooks and tempo shifts fuses nicely, as on the opening "My Dreams About Not Sleeping Until 3 PM", and the thundering "There's No Way Punk Was Meant To Be Done", the results are uniformly enjoyable. The genuine conviction and honesty with which many a soaring all-for-one chorus and deftly executed riff shredding blare forth is what truly propels this musical unit. A certain heart pounding, upbeat immediacy is captured when all runs smoothly, and though there are some dull, comparatively uninspired moments, the sporadic flat chord progression and occasional resurgence of saccharine-pop hook overkill does not detract much from what is by and large a very good record. -Mike Ramek

LAVA BABY - *Big Muff* (Liquid 8 Records) Somewhere between The Archies and The B-52's are Lava Baby. They stake claim to the musical kingdom of 60's/80's, Top 40/New Wave rock. The boundless energy and hipness of "Sex Junkie" is both funny and sad. In it, the girl grills her boyfriend about his sexual fantasies (her kissing another girl, etc.), and how shallow his selfishness is. Hook heavy and enthusiastic, Lava Baby's music conjures up images of big harmonies and big melodies. "Brand New Mood," "Valentine," and "She Loves You," are smart energetic songs that invite audience participation. Their cover on Split End's "I Got You" is given a fresh reading by the band's female vocals. Lava Baby puts the fun back in rock and roll! - Phil Rainone

LEAH STARGAZING – *Leave it All Behind* (www.leahstargazing.com) Decent New Found Glory sounding melodic punk from Rhode Island. They make use of a synthesizer and have a very, very hot girl on the cover of their cd. That's worth two bonus points in my book. – Oliver Lyons

THE LEECHES – *Suck* (www.theleeches.com) Hey! Brit-rock! Allright! The Leeches kinda have an Elastica vibe going on but in a very lo-fi way. The singer has a nice voice but this really doesn •ft rock enough to get me very excited. If you •fre standing around trying to look cool somewhere this is a good soundtrack. – Oliver Lyons

LEISURE MCCORKLE – *Jet Set Baby* (MoRisen Records) The missing ingredient in much of today's "modern rock"(aside from talent) is humility, the ability of the artist to reveal their emotional wounds to the world and share the pain with an appreciative audience. The best rap music has humility aplenty, though it's hard to tell, hidden underneath all the sexual braggadocio, while folk rockers have always worn their wimpy hearts on their sleeves. Not since the early efforts of Elvis Costello, Graham Parker and Joe Jackson – the "angry young men" of the '80s – has rock & roll enjoyed such freedom. In this aspect, Leisure McCorkle is a welcome throwback to an earlier era, an anomaly in an age that champions marketability and profit over sincerity and talent. *Jet Set Baby* shows both in abundance, McCorkle's finely-tuned, guitar-driven, three-minute pop/rock treasures drenched in sincerity and delivered with no small amount of talent. On *Jet Set Baby*, McCorkle throws away memorable lines that lesser songwriters could build entire careers around, verses like the defiant "I don't wanna spend anymore time making records for the popular crowd/I don't want to be the sound that's underground" from "In Touch With My Own Sound." The precocious "jam the radio satans cause we don't like their stations/we don't dig their sounds" from "New York Eyes" has the antagonist chasing a girl, "she's got Chicago style/but New York Eyes." Unlucky in love, yet a hopeless romantic, McCorkle bleeds for us on *Jet Set Baby*, but don't you know that rock & roll cures all, so let's fall in love for a night and the morning will bring another heartbreak. It's okay, though, 'cause "there's a spirit who's soared through the universe/some say he's a master of the lyrical cha-cha-cha/you can't erase his lyrical masterpiece" sings the great McCorkle and I, for one, believe him. Leisure McCorkle is the MAN, a new wave fury with a heart of glass and a bag full o' manic musical hooks. The Reverend has heard the gospel according to McCorkle and now I'm going to "LA-La-La-La-La my way through life!" In a perfect world, Leisure McCorkle would rule the airwaves; as it is, *Jet Set Baby* will have to remain our dirty little secret. The Rev sez "check it out!" On the web: www.leisuremccorkle.com. – Rev. Keith A. Gordon



PICK HIT: Ted Leo & The Pharmacists

TED LEO/PHARMACISTS – *Hearts Of Oak* (Lookout) The first brilliant album of 2003 finds former Chisel frontman Ted Leo making the pure pop album that his Pharmacists project has been slowly building up to. Much has been made of "Where Have All The Rude Boys Gone?", Leo's homage to the multi-racial TwoTone bands of the Eighties, which (far from being the ska track you might expect) flawlessly channels the gritty exuberance of 70's rockers Thin Lizzy. But Leo is something of a chameleon here: "The High Party" marries Elvis Costello's lyrical precision to a bouncy new-wave melody; "Dead Voices" is haunted by the chiming guitars and falsetto vocals of Big Star; "I'm A Ghost" has a dreamy Stax/Volt soul vibe; and the title track "Hearts Of Oak" – which starts off like a mod rocker from Leo's days in Chisel - has a guitar break that quotes Television's "Marquee Moon." But this isn't like Radio 4 or Interpol, or one of those new retro bands that sound like they're remaking a record you already own. Leo – who describes himself as a perpetual English grad student – may just be the most literate and inventive songsmith in punk since Blake Schwarzenbach, who uses the inspiration of his favorite bands as jumping off points for his own unique musical voice. And did I mention that he still calls Bloomfield, NJ home? This record has already earned Leo features in Rolling Stone and Spin, but fear not: You'll be hearing about this CD again when we're all writing down our Best Of 2003 lists a year from now. – Jim Testa

LIAR'S ACADEMY – "Trading My Life" EP (Equal Vision Records, PO Box 14, Hudson, NY, 12534) The new four-song EP from Liar's Academy is way more rock and way less emo than their last full-length, *No News Is Good News*. The boys must have been spinning their Soul Asylum and Replacements records, because something has definitely changed, and for the better. It's a pleasant and comforting listen for fans of the mid-western collegiate sounds of old, but emo kids who dug their last record might be a bit confounded. – Jason Schreurs

THE LIBERTINES - *Up The Bracket* (Rough Trade) The next big thing! The next big thing! Lookie, lookie! I get to review the next big thing!!! Straight from the UK (ooooh!) on ROUGH TRADE RECORDS (double ooooh!) produced by Mr. B.A.D himself MICK JONES (oooooh! 3x) comes the garage, r&b, brit-pop stylings of only the 458th band to call themselves THE LIBERTINES and they.... rock, surprisingly. I was really ready to hate this disc, since the hype surrounding these guys is slowly building to a fever pitch in the NYC area and most bands that are greeted with huge amounts of adulation in the NY area tend to s-u-c-k (see my column this ish.) But The Libertines are the one band this year clever enough not to blatantly rip off The Strokes. Instead they chose to dig deep into the trenches of the musical heritage that their proud British forefathers created and hide their Strokes worship under layers and layers of UK influences. This is most obvious in the title song "Up The Bracket," which if put in a "Best Of" Undertones collection wouldn't seem oe note out of place. The Libertines really do use their Britishness to full effectiveness, so that even when they sing a line like "New York City's very pretty in the night..." it's more endearing then it is nauseating. Highly recommended for people like myself who wish they could constantly live on both sides of the pond - Oliver Lyons

LIFTERPULLER – *Soft Rock* 2-CD (The Self-Starter Foundation) In the longstanding tradition of New York spoken-word bands like King Missile, Jim Carroll Band, and especially Drunken Boat stands Lifterpuller. While too much of this stuff can merge into nonsensical rambling (and two long CDs is too much of this stuff, period), the speak-singing of Craig Finn can be occasionally reminiscent of early Springsteen and it's all certainly Jersey-esque. The apparently gay Finn is obsessed with all things seedy, and all the songs here could be sound-paintings from pre-Giuliani Gotham. The musicians in Lifter Puller are remarkably restrained, mostlyl laying out a mid-tempo rock backdrop with tasteful and sometimes unexpected flourishes only on the rare occasions when Finn shuts up. "Soft Rock" is a collection of the band's first two albums, a self-released EP, 5 songs culled from comps and singles, and five unreleased tracks. As I said, all of this at once is way too much Lifter Puller for anyone to sit through in one sitting, but there are inspired moments here. While not the best of the spoken-word genre (they're certainly no Patti Smith Group,) Lifter Puller is unique and their lack of jokiness makes repeated listenings much more bearable even at the expense of cohesion. – Johnny Puke

LIVE ANIMALS – *Live Animals* (HYPERLINK "http://www.liveanimalsoc.com" www.liveanimalsoc.com) The best thing about this record is the note that accompanied it. It was a loving letter written by the bass player, Paul Vasterling, thanking Jersey Beat for giving him the opportunity to submit the CD for review and explaining that he would appreciate any feedback that the magazine could give the band. Structurally speaking, Live Animals write a much better letter than rock record. It amazes me that people still make music like this. It tours every genre of punk music being played in California between 1989 and 1995. There are ska guitars that give way to pop-punk parts, punctuated by straightforward pauses and predictable chord progressions. There is an over all Rancid-esque sound to the vocals that, while pulled off well, sounds derivative at best. There "fs a lot of talking about drinking and a lot of spontaneous shouting of the word Go! For my last listen of this record, I stuck the CD into the computer so I could write while it played. By mistake, I hit repeat and the same song kept playing over and over. It took me ten minutes to notice. I'm just sayin "f. –Joel Roston

LOOKWELL – "Unhurried" 5-song EP (Eskimo Kiss Records, PO Box 3603, Wilmington NC 28406) Lookwell hails from North Carolina, but their sound is pure Athens (Georgia, that is): Twangy chimey guitars, a wavery, starry-eyed lead singer, and an overweening earnestness. There's nothing wrong with sounding like REM (especially today, when it's something of a rarity.) Unfortunately, there's nothing particularly exciting about it either. – Jim Testa

MARY LORSON & BILLY COTE - "Piano Creeps" ep (The First Time - www.tftrecords.com) Former members of Madder Rose and Saint Low unite to give an album of mostly-instrumental music that's always haunting and beautiful, yet sometimes a bit of a snooze. I hate to condone it, kids, but Piano Creeps makes for some beautiful music to be lazy and unproductive to. –Darren Paltrowitz

THE LOST SOUNDS – *Rat's Brains & Microchips* (Empty Records US, PO Box 12034, Seattle, WA, 98102) The hype is on for The Lost Sounds and, as far as the spazzy garage rock genre goes, it's hype of the deserved variety. *Rat's Brains & Microchips* (great name) hits the floor running and doesn't take a lot of time to breathe or relent, giving listeners an earful of cacophonous, screechy racket that is bliss to the ears of garage, no-wave or synth-punk fans. What sets this Memphis band apart from the annoying breed of new wave resurgence bands is their ability to expand into different genres like surf, hardcore, goth and pop. Not only that, but the songs have a lot of variety and experimentation and the Lost Sounds don't get annoying at the rapid rate that most of their contemporaries do. – Jason Schreurs

THE LOT SIX – *Animals* (Espo Records, PO Box 63, Allston MA 02134) This second full-length release in less than a year from Boston's Lot Six shows how meaningless the label "noise band" can be when the band in question merrily ignores labels and just rocks. On explosively raucous tracks like "Freezin' Scene" and "Rat On A Leash," the Lot Six let go – messier than Fugazi, more out of control than Rye Coalition, funkier than Dismemberment Plan's been in a long time. But just when you think you're in for one hell of a sonic workout, the band starts radically changing gears cut to cut: "My Son" reins things in for a twangy cowpunk workout, "I Get High" gets all garagey, and "Save Yourself" and "The Tiniest Tin" sashay like the Rolling Stones in country-blues mode. Then there's "Old Bass River Road," which lopes along like one of those acoustic numbers that Paul Westerberg used to stick on the B-sides of Replacements singles, and the bare bones, gutbucket blues raunch of "Took My Place," which sounds like an old demo that Aerosmith misplaced back around 1973. "Animals" was recorded in the same July, 2001 sessions that produced "Gwylo," the band's debut full-lengther released this past Spring, and certainly should find favor with fans of eclectic high-energy rock like the Vines and the Hives. - Jim Testa

LUDICRA- *Lucrida's Hollow Psalms* (Life Is Abuse, P.O. Box 20524, Oakland, CA 9420). California black metal with female vocals. The album is pretty decent, but it lacks a little due to mediocre production. The CD contains 8 tracks of pretty material, intricate guitar work, and lots of breakdowns with guitar effects. Another aspect of this band I enjoyed was the way the two singers (both female) complement each other, so as to not create a monotonous record. –Phil Pinto

MAD CADDIES - *Just One More* (Fat Wreck Chords)The Mad Caddies new release "Just One More," is a very infectious and rhythmic record. Full of downbeat, melodic sounds, the bands music is reminiscent of the Bosstones. They reach beyond ska and punk, adding dancehall, rockabilly, surf, and even some salsa. Veterans of the Warped Tour ('97, '98, & '00), their music has the flexibility, and persistence to create a wide fan base. The Mad Caddies are one of those bands (Goldfinger, Catch 22, etc.), that when you hear they're coming to town, you circle the date on your calendar, and before going to the show, you spend the day listening to their music, getting really pumped up! This is the band your friend keeps telling you about, so don't miss them next time around. - Phil Rainone

MAE - *Destination: Beautiful* (Tooth and Nail Records, PO Box 12698, Seattle, WA 98111) Mae is incredibly melodic and deeply harmonious, but this was too pristine and glossy for my tastes. Opening with the jangly "This Time is the Last Time," Mae revealed itself to be an energized, yet somewhat predicable band. "Runaway" featured a fairly warm guitar riff during the chorus, but was otherwise flat. This same shortcoming was heard on the slick "Embers and Envelopes" and "Last Call." The nearly six minute long "Skyline Drive" featured more inspiration as the band began to spread its musical wings and display a more experimental side, however "Soundtrack for Our Movie" and "Summertime" were nearly identical in form and delivery. As *Destination: Beautiful* concluded with "Goodbye, Goodnight," the disc wrapped up with a healthy guitar riff that I only wished had reared itself earlier and more often. They may have their hearts in the right place, but Mae left me somewhat bored.-Rich Quinlan

THE MAGINOT LINE - *Paris Burning* (Ambiguous City Records, PO Box 31560, Baltimore Md. 21207) Each and every nugget of angular, layered guitar rock from The Maginot Line is delivered quite quickly. *Paris Burning* runs barely 38 minutes, but a what a ride the band produces! Maginot Line, featuring former members of Branch Manager and Corm, squeeze 11 smart, crisply played anthems into a record that is refreshingly melodic while also highly energized. The band also displays a wide array of styles. From the jangly guitar of "Working Hard to Make a Bad Life Worse" and "Primate Dynamic," to the incredible harmonies of "Eight By Nine" and "Fuck Yeah," to the Fugazi-esque noise of the closing "Turban for the Crown," this is a band in which each member perfectly complements the other. The guitar playing and vocal dynamics of Rob Anthony and Sean Lara are in perfect synchronicity with the tremendous rhythm section of Dave Allen and drummer Mark Stalzer. This is smart indie rock in its purest sense, as Maginot Line uses a rock basic formula of strong guitar and big rhythms and enhances it with precisely placed vocals. I was impressed from beginning to end. - Rich Quinlan

MATT POND PA - *The Nature of Maps* (Polyvinyl Records, PO Box 7140, Champaign, IL 61826-7140) So the press seems to love this band, and I guess for a solid reason, because they are a refreshing breeze of fresh air in a somewhat stagnant music world. Frankly, I do not believe that indie rock is all that stagnant, and while MP PA play lush, sprawling songs driven by cello, acoustic guitar and Pond's somewhat off-kilter voice, I found myself drifting off by the middle of the third track, the loss of the weekend lament, "The Party." Poetic, poignant and pretty? Absolutely, and if that is what you want, MP PA will have you smiling from ear to ear, but this was just not for me. With influences including the Kinks, the Zombies and any band that utilized a cello, Pond constructed a warm blanket of a record, a deeply emotional collection of songs that are lovely, but not for those interested in blowing off some steam or working out aggressions. The band, particularly cellists Jim Hostetter and Eve Miller are limitlessly skilled musicians, but tis was just too quiet. Gentle and soothing, *The Nature of Maps* will undoubtedly earn volumes of press praise, and it deserves all that is said, but you simply have to love lullabies to love this. – Rich Quinlan

THE MELIGROVE BAND - *Let It Grow* (Endearing Records/Ductape Records) Ok, the first songs starts out with a surf guitar riff which melds into some 60's style garage pop singalongs and then the flute pops up. Uh? Wha? When the vocals hit full on in the second song, I'm reminded of the Turtles meet the Beatles meet the Beach Boys meet pop-punk. These guys obviously spent many hours perusing their parents' old LP collections. They even sport the "mop top" hairdo circa '66 in the band picture on the CD jacket. Horns, organ, plaintively innocent major key vocal melodies, underscored by a rocking foundation of guitar/bass/drums and some clever songcraft impress indeed. By song three they introduce some Bay City Rollers/Abba-esque jams and I'm hooked. I like it. By song six they're flirting with the poppier side of Zappa circa late 60's Mothers of Invention. I like even more. Then the pop perfection of "Really, Really, Really" hits and I'm sold. I like a lot. By the time of the guitar-fueled rave-up of "Take Me to The Sun" (including the best backwards guitar solos I've heard in years), I'm bouncing around the room. It's funny, their "one sheet" (what those in the "business" call the promo/bio sheets sent to us journalists) says that their live shows are intensely chaotic, loud, and riotous. They certainly rock well enough on this disc but I can't imagine the sweetly orchestrated pop that permeates most of the alum translated into such a rock n' roll orgy. Nevertheless, that's what they say. Reminiscent yet refreshing, The Meligrove Band dish out a solid record of well produced pop-rock beauties. Not bad for a bunch of Canucks, eh? - Eric Walls

THE MENDOZA LINE - *If They Knew This Was The End* (Bar/None Records, Po Box 1704, Hoboken, NJ 07030) The Mendoza Line is a band I simply missed. I do not know why or how it happened, but *If They Knew This Was The End* helps to off-set my guilt and self-loathing by providing eighteen nuggets of well crafted pop delicacies that have a variety of dynamics. There is the infectious fuzz of "This Charm" and "Running With an Older Crowd" and the more rugged guitar of "The Seventh Round", "Small Town Napoleons", "Dollars to Donuts" and "Camera Shy", a song the Replacements should have written. Additionally, you are treated to the more gentle tones of "If You Knew Her as I Know Her" and "Lbs. Doesn't Make a Man". In depth liner notes written by Timothy Bracy give an insight into the formation, struggles and writing decisions of a band, along with copious information about Athens, Ga. and the impact the city had, and continues to have, upon the band. This is a most for all who love the Mendoza Line, or those, like myself, who finally have had our eyes opened. - Rich Quinlan

THE MICROPHONES – *Mount Eerie* (K Records, Box 7154, Olympia WA 98507) *Mount Eerie* opens with a swelling rhythmic pulse, builds to a crashing crescendo and then, about halfway through the 17-minute opus "The Sun," descends into instrumental chaos before hitting its stride with sparsely-accompanied, morose vocals. You have to respect a band that opens an album with what amounts to a funeral dirge, as the Microphones have done with *Mount Eerie*. One of many musical projects for the enigmatic Phil Elvrum, the Microphones have a reputation as fantastic purveyors of experimental psychedelic pop, but Elvrum has grander schemes in mind. Much as the band's 2001 album *The Glow, Pt. 2* was connected to its predecessor, so too is *Mount Eerie* part of the same thread, a concept album exploring the transitional nature of life and the finality of death. White noise and subliminal sounds introduce "Solar System," dissolving into a melancholy folk-rock head-scratcher while "Universe" throws orchestral grandeur alongside droning decay. The lengthy title cut is the centerpiece of the album, clashing voices (including K labelmates Mirah and Calvin Johnson) providing fleeting and tantalizing scraps of lyrics while the mesmerizing "Universe," with chanted vocals and rhythmic instrumentation, closes out *Mount Eerie*. A difficult album, *Mount Eerie* offers a surreal listening experience, reminding this writer of 80s-era mad scientists like Current 93 or Nurse With Wound, though without the occult trappings or industrial baggage. On the web: www.krecs.com. – Rev. Keith A. Gordon

MIDSTATES - *Shadowing Ghosts* (Mental Monkey Records, PO Box 20068, Greeley Square Station, New York, NY 10001-0005, www.mentalmonkeyrecords.com) Space rock with a vengeance. This is sometimes light and delicate, such as on "Sound Lake." But it can get loud and swirly. Lots of electric piano and synth, soft, wispy vocals, you know the stuff. Sometimes it's very indie-pop, but sometimes it seems like it owes its allegiance to old Elton John material. I guess this stuff can be pretty cool, particularly after smoking a blunt, but be sure not to try to drive or operate heavy machinery under the influence of MIDSTATES. - Paul Silver

MIKE V AND THE RATS (Indecision Records, PO Box 6052, Garden Grove, CA 92846) Legendary tough-as-nails skate icon Mike Vallely offers five charged hardcore punk anthems, evoking a raw, straight up early SST-era feel that is fairly effective and convincing, although at times a bit loose and off-kilter. The uniformly raw guitar work does a fair job mimicking the very distinct guttural output of the early SoCal Black Flag/B'last! era, and a simplistic lyrical scheme that is mostly successful in conveying the anthemic urgency imbued in each number complements this wiry musical backbone sufficiently. The vocals, however, while spirited and unabashed, seem a bit lacking at times in the level of energy and ingenuity necessary to fully pull it all off, though. Furthermore, musicianship that is lacking in the tightness of this band's obvious progenitors weakens the delivery a bit, as well. Still, Mike Vallely and company prove successful in offering a listenable and vitriolic debut. – Mike Ramek

PICK HIT: Milwaukees, *This Is A Stickup*

THE MILWAUKEES - *This Is A Stickup* (Does Everyone Stare?) The Milwaukees emerge here with a sharp and very mature sounding guitar pop record. Blending big riffs and soaring vocals, *This Is a Stickup* is a marvelously produced and crisp sounding release. Having heard only small amounts of the band in the past, I was immediately impressed with the breadth of sound heard here. Quite often beginning quietly and in the most non-threatening of manners, the songs on *This Is a Stickup* slowly build momentum before hitting thunderous crescendos before gently fading back to calm. Tracks like "Jet Clipper", "Call An Ambulance", "Berlin Wall", "Angel With a Knife" and "Jazz Is" all balance a volcanic edge while never abandoning their precise melodies. A dazzling record. - Rich Quinlan

THE MISHAPS - *Get Away Volume* (Scissor Records, POB 206512, New Haven, CT 06520) This trio of Baltimore blue collar punkish upstarts finds a happy middle ground between hard -edged and catchy song writing. They're not afraid to share some emotional pangs either, i.e."Anything for You". Fans of Tiger Army and the Living End will find this a nice compliment to their collections. A good start with a full lengther due spring of '. – Tom Brebric

MISS LONELYHEART - *Signal and Response* (Molecular Laboratories, P.O. Box 791, Federick, MD 21705) For the past two weeks, Miss Lonelyheart's third full length has been supplying the much needed momentum for my subway ride to work every morning. This is a rock release that takes all the elements of punk, pop and metal and throws it together into a refreshing blast of verve, that stands above the wreckage that is passing for indy rock. This three piece, with the help of production wizard J. Robbins, articulate a passion for writing authentic songs that will clutch your body like the tightest of bear hugs. Be careful, however, because the sounds contained on this release are liable to provoke a dead mind out from under the covers. We wouldn't want a bunch of kids running around pursuing something as ungraspable as their dreams, would we? - Dan Storchan

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MORAL CRUX – *Pop Culture Assassins* (Panic Button, 3264 Adeline St., Berkeley, CA, 94712) Ben Weasel's Portland obsession is well-founded, as Moral Crux have always delivered catchy, political pop punk of the highest order. *Pop Culture Assassins* is no exception, often bringing to mind later-era Screeching Weasel (you know, when they sounding like your grandpa trying to play punk), which, I'm sure, is another reason why ol' Mr. Weasel gets a kick out of this band. The sickly sweet pop numbers (with, surprise, surprise, Mass Giorgini at the helm) sound pretty weird as the soundtrack to radical politics because, let's be honest, we're used to having our messages screamed in our faces. In some ways, the lyrics are delivered with even more impact when played clean and poppy. No more undecipherable, garbled vocals and scare-your-parents-core, it's time to bring on the political pop-punk revolution! Moral Crux will be leading the charge, and giving us tooth decay while they're at it. – Jason Schreurs

THE MOUNTAIN GOATS – *Tallahassee* (4AD Records) The Mountain Goats represent a departure from the typical 4AD modus operandi. Although *Tallahassee* opens with the title cut – a moody, atmospheric 4AD-styled snoozefest – most of the remaining tracks are a pastiche of alt-rock with folkish tendencies. Mountain Goat John Darnielle has been kicking around the indie rock hinterlands for over a decade now, prolifically cranking out lo-fi tunes that are long on lyrical retrospection and short on grand musical aspirations. Although slicker and certainly enjoying a larger recording budget, *Tallahassee* shouldn't alienate any long-time Goat fans even as it recruits new listeners. Darnielle's nasal bleat takes some getting used to, but delve beneath the surface and you'll find a complex and interesting wordsmith. Tracks like the lovingly discordant story song "See America Right," the whimsical "No Children," with its lovely piano fills, or the bittersweet "Old College Try" witness a dark sense of humor and an intelligence sorely lacking from more commercial musical fare. Deeply personal, delicately crafted and about as far from the **Billboard** Top Forty as you're likely to tread, the Mountain Goats' *Tallahassee* is nevertheless an earnest effort, John Darnielle a troubadour for a new era. – Rev. Keith A. Gordon

THE MOVIE LIFE - EP (Drive-Thru Records) Four songs from their upcoming release "Forty Hour Train Back to the Penn," that are authentic, pop, punk rock songs. Substance over style, quality over quanity. The melodies will get stuck in your head, along with stories that show the band's song writing maturity and infectious energy. The full CD sounds like it will be on solid ground! -Phil Rainone

MY SO-CALLED BAND- *Always Something There To Destroy Me* (Suicide Watch Records, P.O. Box 9599 Charlotte NC 28299) This Cd was a burst of emotion. The band sings of the days when punk was less "fragmented," when it was one vast form of music. I completely agree with their wishes of punk rock unity. I salute them for keeping alive the "old régime" of alternative music. The music itself is fast hardcore, "organized chaos" - it's great! It reminds me of NOFX and probably The Sex Pistols, The Ramones and most of the early scene punk bands. This style cast aside by a new generation has been picked up and dusted off by My So-called Band but with the sweets comes the sours; they are now considered an acquired taste reserved for the most serious music fans. I as a serious music fan commend their individuality and enthusiasm. This band will be around for a while securing the purity and integrity of punk. – Caitlin Mason

THE MYSTERY GIRLS (www.trickkneeproductions.com) Yeah! Allright! Nineteen year old kids doin' the MC5. Uh-huh! Okay! This I can deal with! Now when I say doin' the MC5 I'm not talking about The Vines or The Hives type of phony, pretty garage, but the real MC5 kinda rock. They play harmonicas for christ sakes! Onward Mystery Girls! Go out and conquer- but please tell your lead singer to cut his hair. He has that Hives look going which is stupid beyond all belief. - Oliver Lyons

NADA SURF - *Let Go* (Barsuk, POB 22546, Seattle WA 98122) If you'd thought *high/low* was the creative peak of this band you were very wrong. Although the band's especially good second album is currently being re-released by Barsuk, Let Go is that Nada Surf album that's worth your dollars. It's more mellow than anything the band has previously released, although that doesn't mean that this isn't a musically diverse release. Try "Blizzard Of '77" and "Inside Of Love" for starters, the latter already being a hit in Europe -- rightfully so. –Darren Paltrowitz

NAKATOMI PLAZA – *Private Property* (Immigrant Sun Records, P.O. Box 150711, Brooklyn NY 11215) Unabashedly hardcore, Nakatomi Plaza manages to soften the blow of its guitar-driven fury with some well-crafted melodies and thoughtful, acoustic-oriented vocal passages. An expanded CD release of the original 7-song album, *Private Property* builds upon the passion and intelligence of innovators like Minor Threat. Nakatomi Plaza's odd time signatures and syncopated rhythms complimented by Husker Du-styled melodies and spoken, sung and shouted lyrics. Songs like "Bike Rock Revolution" and "Next Bus To New Orleans" evince a certain social consciousness, but really attempt to lyrically reconcile the fragility of human relationships carried on under the spectre of ever-growing societal fascism. *Private Property* is a thought-provoking and intelligent record, Nakatomi Plaza the hardcore punk equivalent of System Of A Down. On the web: www.immigrantsun.com. – Rev. Keith A. Gordon

NEAR MISS - *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies* (Fearless Records) You know what every Fearless Records band sounds like right? Near Miss sounds just like that. Melodic punk. It's pretty good for what it is but it's still nothing to write home about. - Oliver Lyons

NERVE GENERATOR – *Erasing Our Minds* (www.nervegenerator.com) Analog synths, zingy guitars, catchy tunes, and lots of fun: Brooklyn's Nerve Generator bring back the days of sugar-coated synth-pop hits, but with a twist... "Down Town Noun" percolates with a light-hearted Mod trippiness, like the early Kinks on holiday, and "Crazy For" has the hazy, lazy grandeur of the Pet Shop Boys covering "Femme Fatale." Mostly though, this is just head-popping pop that's a pleasant change from all the guitar bands dominating NYC these days, and guaranteed to bring a smile. – Jim Testa

NEVER HEARD OF IT – *Limited Edition* (www.neverheardofit.com) Socal punk. Decent but pretty bland. Look for their video on M2 and their poster on your sister's bedroom wall in the next couple of months. – Oliver Lyons

NEW BOMB TURKS – *The Night Before The Day The Earth Stood Still* (Gearhead, PO Box 421219, San Francisco CA 94142) This is a somewhat confusing release from this prolific Ohio quartet. While "Hassle Street" is a rockin' rave up familiar to old NBT fans, all of the album's other 12 songs point to a new "rock" direction. The most over the top moment here is the song "Like Ghosts," which lyrically, vocally, and musically could be a freakin' Meat Loaf outtake. As in the past, the lyrics here are largely disposable and riddled with Eric Davidson's peculiar David Lee Roth-like vocals and his Jon Spencer-like habit of inserting rock cliches like "Yeah!" and "Awright!" all over the place. On the plus side, the production here is better than any previous effort, despite a big step down label-wise. All in all, kids, if this album tells us anything, it's that the New Bomb Turks' best days are behind them. – Johnny Puke

NINE TEEN - *Tearing Me Apart* (Dark Front Records, PO Box 291, St. Charles MO 63302-0291) With a sound that could sometimes remind you of Minor Threat, the Circle Jerks or a variety of other classic hardcore giants, NineTeen boldly wear their influences on their shirts, but this band is simply great and *Tearing Me Apart* should be an instant classic. Forty-two (!) blazing efforts explore a myriad of emotions and topics, from humor ("No More Girl Songs", ""No Decaf"), politics ("Slander and Libel", "Lies That You've Sold"), social questioning ("God at War" "Your Lifestyle's a Joke", "1,2,3 Conformity") to poignancy ("Christina's Song"), yet all are 100% pure punk bliss. Spastic guitar, kinetic playing and raucous singing accent each song and you really do not want this to end. Fifteen of the tracks were rerecorded back in 2000, when the guys were only 15 years of age. Now, at the ripe old age of 17, NineTeeen sound like a band just beginning to understand and recognize their own genius. The next few decades should be a lot of fun with these guys around.-Rich Quinlan

ONE MAN ARMY - *Rumours & Headlines* (BYO) The most played CD in my stack for the past two months. Classic style punk with gobs of melody and sing along lyrics. SF based but touring incessantly since ' – this is energetic and honest with enough pop sensibility to garner airplay where other bands might not. Similarities to the Clash and Green Day are obvious since they even worked with some of these guys. Pub style rock with serious subject matter done with scratchy vocals. – Tom Brebric

THE ORANGES BAND - *On TV* (Lookout, 3264 Adeline Street, Berkeley, CA 94703, www.theorangesband.com) Immediately after listening to *On TV*, I was fiddling with an old stereo tuned to a Philadelphia-based classic rock station and noted - aloud and to myself - that The Doobie Brothers' sound is much fuller than The Oranges Band, who resonate an intense flatness, evoking the parlance of a damp rag. Hey, The Doobie Brothers aren't so bad. I kind of like those oldsters, really, especially for appearing on the anti-bootlegging episode of What's Happening (even if I didn't agree with the politics of their lesson they still rocked!). And when I was in grade school there was a janitor who always wore a Doobie Brothers shirt. It made them and him seem cool to me. He drove a tractor. But The Oranges Band? I can't imagine anyone wearing a shirt announcing their love of The Oranges Band. "Self and Siddhartha" points to the possibility of an interesting lyrical deviation (fans of Herman Hesse? Buddha? - shocking!), but the threads are never taken up or carried further to some cohesively structured text in the distance. Musically, the best songs flitted inmy head temporarily like like a less-interesting version of The Strokes, who are already a less-interesting version of a few other bands. -Brandon Stosuy

ORANGE BEAUTIES – *Relax With...* (Washroom Recordings, PO Box 483, Oceanside, NY, 11572) Sometimes I swear the music gods are testing me. Orange Beauties had me contemplating the death of music, or myself, whichever I could take care of first. This is blatantly horrible alt-rock with scores of reverb, organs, geek vocals and other such undesirables. They even manage to make feedback sound bad. Couple all of this with a downright unforgivable production sound (demo tape, anyone?) and, ladies and germs, we have ourselves a big, fat loser. – Jason Schreurs

OURS – *Precious* (Dreamworks) I didn't hesitate to criticize Ours' debut CD, *Distorted Lullabies*, which I found pretentious and overly dependent on lead singer Jimmy Gnecco's verbal gymnastics (which struck me as too closely calculated to appeal to the cult of the late Jeff Buckley.) So let me say right away how much more I enjoyed *Precious.* Gnecco doesn't shy away from his trademark falsetto, and the music still has that gloomy gothic edge, but this record rocks a lot more than *Distorted Lullabies.* The guitar parts are much stronger, the ensemble work more evident, and overall, it seems much more a band record and less a solo showcase for Gnecco's vocals. That spirit extends to the inclusion of "In A Minute," an early track written before the band's Dreamworks deal by guitarist Dave Milone. There's also an unexpected cover – the Velvet Underground's "Femme Fatale," which has Gnecco channeling the florid style of REM's Michael Stipe, and probably comes as close as anything ever will to establishing that Ours might actually have a sense of humor. But it's in the *Grand Guignol* fireworks of tracks like "Kill The Band," "Leaves," and "Red Colored Stars" that Ours truly shines, showering the listener with haunting melodies, Gnecco's tortured vocals, and powerful guitar lines that stick in your mind long after the CD has left your player. – Jim Testa

OUTSPOKEN - *Bitter Shovel* (Lava/Atlantic) Outspoken have a heavy, dark vibe similar to bands like the Deftones or Ministry. The songs lean obsessively (it's a good thing), toward catchy, guitar-driven Top 40 radio. The difference being that Top 40 records covey a certain lifestyle. The cars, the houses, that's not the American Dream, that's the booby prize. (Please pull my soapbox out from under me whenever you feel the need). The music works in layers, requiring more than one listen to absorb the band's message. Often focusing on self-empowerment, the music is both uplifting and realistic. - Phil Rainone

Panic In Detroit

PANIC IN DETROIT – EP (Silverthree Sound Recordings, PO Box 3621, Fairfax VA 22038) They're called Panic In Detroit; they come from Houston, Texas; they're on a suburban D.C. label (and produced by J Robbins at D.C.'s legendary Inner Ear Studios;) and they sound like NJ's Shades Apart. That's a lot of geography for a young trio. With beefy vocals, riff-heavy guitar, and solid but unspectacular songwriting, the Shades Apart comparison seems most appropriate; you could play this EP on college radio alongside anything from Jimmy Eat World to Avril Lavigne and it wouldn't sound out of place, although it really doesn't have much personality of its own. "A Major in Biochemistry" is the punkiest of the EP's 5 tracks, and sounds to me like the band's homage to the Descendents (doesn't Milo have a PhD in biochem or something?) while "This Is Why We Can't Have Nice Things" has a heavier, more mainstream Foo Fighters-type sound. This left me pretty ambivalent; nothing wrong with it, but no real reason to play it again. – Jim Testa

THE PARTICLE SEVEN – *Nulti* (119 E 2nd St., Moorestown NJ 08057; www.theparticleseven.com) Not to be confused with Particle Zoo. Catchy, new-wavey, kinda garagey, deadpan popsters... That's The Particle Seven in a nutshell. The sci-fi synths and cheesey backing harmonies add a nice touch. Some of the vocals have a tongue-in-cheek sci-fi theme too. "Way Out In The Universe" starts out like a Jonathan Richman outtake. But most of this is swinging Sixties garage-pop, bouncy and catchy; close your eyes and you'll see slim girls in mini-skirts doing the frug. And that's not a bad thing. – Jim Testa

THE PATTERN - *Real Feelness* (Lookout! Records) "Our culture has lost the ability to swing. A bunch of squares are running this planet. They've turned martinis into homogenized milk. They took away Nancy Sinatra, and gave us Martha Stewart. The music is the message, we are but the messengers, baby!" - Little Stephen Van Zant (host of "Underground Garage" radio show). That pretty much sums up the current trend in pop music for me. The Pattern breaks that trend. Along with new (The Vines, Hives) and seasoned (The Mad Daddies, Rockcats) garage-rock bands, the Pattern energizes the music scene with a rattle and shake all their own. Their influences range from the Stooges to any one of those cool One Hit Wonder bands of the 60's & 70's. Songs like "You or You," "Last Night Called," and "Selling Submarines" talk about heartache, lust, love, & tragedy without pretense. The latter song (and the rest of the album) has that looseness that Little Stephen spoke about. This disc deserves your attention. If for nothing else than to have fun nd kick out some jams! - Phil Rainone

PAULSON – *Ridiculous/Engine* EP (New World Records, PO Box 2062, Rivervale, NJ, 07675) Let's just say first off that there are entirely too many bands in the world. Paulson are like that local band you cringe at every time they magically appear on your favorite touring band's bill. Painful, painful, painful... it's like Weezer meets Get Up Kids meets hell, all on a demo tape budget and with about as much conviction as Ronnie James Dio's hairline. – Jason Schreurs

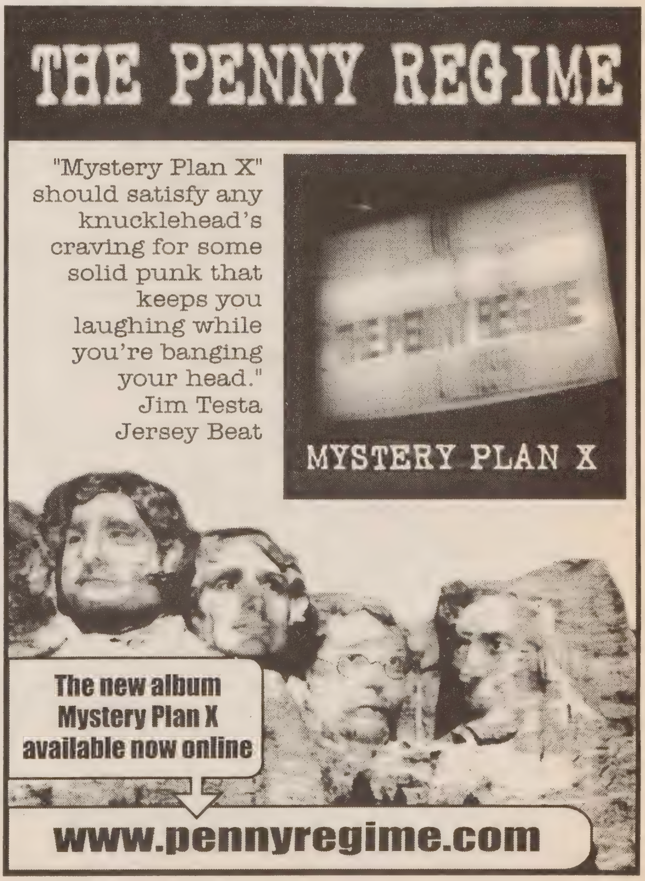
PELE - *Enemies* (Polyvinyl, PO Box 7140, Champaign IL 61826-7140) If you have heard Pele in the past, you should know the drill; four incredibly gifted musicians get together and blend pop, rock and jazz into marvelous anthems sans vocals that convey more emotion than most vocalist could ever dream of expressing. *Enemies* is yet another step forward for a band that continually expands their horizons. The eight instrumentals have similarities to past Pele efforts, particularly the staggering *The Nudes*, but there is a more pronounced sense of darkness here. From the opening pounding that kicks off "Crisis Win" or the brief guitar squall of "Hospital Sports", there is a new level of intensity present. Drummer Jon Mueller and bassist Matt Tennessen are giving greater latitude while never overshadowing Pele's driving force, guitarist Chris Rosenau, who also recorded the disc. Possibly the most noticeable difference here is the expanded responsibilities of Jon Minor, whose digital manipulations breathe unabashed life into a number of these lengthy efforts. I was wildly impressed with the claming tranquility of "Hooves", while being equally taken by the free, jazz-inspired instrumentation of "Sepit". Pele is a band that first caught my attention a few years ago, and I was surprised that I enjoyed them as much as I did. After hearing three albums, it is clear that Pele have figured out a refreshingly uninhibited musical interpretation. - Rich Quinlan

THE PENNY REGIME - Mystery Plan X (www.pennyregime.com) Anyone pining for the goofy punk vibe of bands like the Dead Milkmen or They Might Be Giants will relish this second offering from Baltimore's Penny Regime. Funky like the early Dismemberment Plan and funny like you wouldn't believe, the band tosses off witty broadsides at targets ranging from emo grrls to office brown-nosers to coprophiliac rabbis to dysfunctional relatives (like crazy Uncle Larry, whom you'll find licking the strippers' feet down at the local nudie bar.) Some of the songs fall a bit flat ("Ponies" overbakes an idea that Ween already beat to death years ago,) but the yuks far outweigh the groans. Moreover, the Penny Regime is smart enough to know that joke-rock stops being funny pretty quickly if it doesn't also rock; so while lead singer Uncle Lead's lyrics veer from the weird to the wacky, the band lays down solid funk grooves courtesy of a killer rhythm section, some impressively catchy melodies, and plenty of memorable old-school metal riffs from new guitarist The Infidell. "Mystery Plan X" should satisfy any knucklehead's craving for some solid punk that keeps you laughing while you're banging your head. – Jim Testa

PIGFACE – *Easy Listening* (Invisible) It was once such a treat to hear a new Pigface album. The name quickly became a symbol for a revolving underground, industrio-electronic Olympic team. This is no longer. The latest release solidifies what I've been thinking for some time, now: Pigface sucks. For those interested, there are some worthy names to drop on this album: Keith Levine (PiL, The Clash), Penn Jillette (Penn & Teller), Jared Louche (Chemlab), Chris Connelly (Revolting Cocks, Ministry), Greta Brinkman (Moby), and Chris Haskett (Rollin's band), to name a few. There is a very tired spirit of "sexy-girl-sounds-innocent-but-will-tie-you-to-the-fucking-ceiling-fan-for-breakfast," amid bits of controlled chaos and confrontational one-liners. When you get right down to it, I guess it's the really just bad, bad music. No matter what sort of idea is going on, it's the heavy weight of mediocre songwriting that drags this album down. I don't know if these lads and lasses just don't spend enough time together, or if it's that they save their best for their respective bands, but whatever the case, *Easy Listening* is only for the diehard Pigface fan that can't say no. –Greg Matherly

PIVOT - *Where the Debris Meets the Sea* (Purple Skunk Records, www.purpleskunkrecords.com) If these guys play their cards right, they could be the next big thing on commercial alternative radio. They have that definite commercial punk sound, but mixed with a heavy dose of faux garage. It adds up to just another band trying to cash in on a trend, with no original sound of their own. - Paul Silver

PLASTIC EAST – *Tales From The Black River* (www.plasticeast.com) Roll over, Realistics, and tell Mooney Suzuki the news. This New Brunswick trio bangs out garage-rock with an ferocity and an authenticity that's hard to believe given their young years, from the bluesy groove of "Toll Booth Girl" to the pounding R&B stomp of "Mystified." When Plastic East switches gears, it's to the rootsy Americana of "Fire In The Pines," which sounds like Peter Stampfel jamming with The Band, or the acoustic campfire nonsense of "2 Birds" and "Just Like Everyone Else." Put it all together and you get the title track, "Tales From The Black River," where Mark Twain meets John Mellencamp and they both sing Kinks songs while rafting down the Raritan. Yee-hah. – Jim Testa



THE PENNY REGIME

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Jersey Beat

MYSTERY PLAN X

The new album
Mystery Plan X
available now online

www.pennyregime.com

POLARIS MINE (Beatville Records, P.O. Box 42462, Washington, DC 20015; www.beatville.com) You can see why Polaris Mine recently transplanted itself to Boston from trendy Williamsburg in Brooklyn. The band 's mixture of quirky melodies, minimalist guitar tones, and innocent boy/girl vocals is a far cry from the retro garage-rock currently in favor back in the Big Apple. Guitarist Joel Roston and bassist Jordyn Bonds sing back and forth in phlegmatic, slightly flat voices about summer vacations, FM radio, froggy ponds, lawn darts, and drugs, among other things, while staccato bursts of trebley post-punk guitar and blats of punchy bass roil above Jim Sykes' steady, fluid drumming. "Festival Of Dis" captures the voices of two vapid women arguing over a melancholy vibraphone; Holy Seinfeld, Batman, it's a song about nothing! (But cool nonetheless.) There's something about Polaris Mine's jumpy, fragmented melodies, ragged rhythms, and youthful innocence that's hard to resist, even if you're unlikely to leave for work humming any of these tunes the next day. - Jim Testa

PORCELAIN GOD - *Home Taping is Killing Music* (Slutfish Records, 327 Bedford Ave., #A2, Brooklyn, NY 11211) I don't really know what this is to be honest. This is apparently some old New York punk from 1982 featuring Billy Syndrome from Prick. This could be a rare find for NY punk scene historians but it just sounds like badly recorded noise to me. Then again, I'm probably wrong. - Oliver Lyons

POTHOLE SKINNY – *Time Shapes The Forest Lake* (Perhaps Transparent, 189 Devoe St. 1st Floor, Bklyn NY 11211) An absolutely gorgeous collection of folk-inflected melodies. If anyone's old enough to remember NJ bands like Speed The Plough and even the later Feelies, the feeling here is much the same. A talented ensemble playing cello, violin, banjo, harmonium, and a host of other folk instruments join Pothole Skinny's core three members on these recordings. Even the song titles speak of this record's tranquil, soothing feel – "The Sussex Railroad Song," "Dream Of the Labia Lament," "Beneath The Frozen Pond"... As refreshing and relaxing as a perfect day in the country, Pothole Skinny offers the perfect alternative to the nerve-jangling freneticism of so much of today's indie rock. – Jim Testa

PRETTY GIRLS MAKE GRAVES– EP (Dim Mak, P.O. Box 14041 Santa Barbara CA 93107) These guys (and girl) are really good. They play that style of post punk that is all the rage these days. They bring to mind a few obvious influences, which I'm sure they're heard before. But hell, its my job to indulge, so that being said...the male vocals are very much like Guy Picciotto from Fugazi; actually, a LOT of the vocals are like fugazi, even the female ones. Also, they bring to mind the later and less pop-punk days of Discount – when they actually had a decent recording budget, and were experimenting with the standard punk formula. There are some people in PGMK from old bands such as Kill Sadie (a great band) and Murder City Devils. These guys are most likely going to be huge. They just signed to Matador, and tour like crazy. I saw them play one time, at Coney Island, and although they definitely aren't doing anything different from what At The Drive-In was doing, they still put on a great show, and are definitely worth checking out. It looks like the future of punk rock is gonna stay in the future; for now we'll rock out to good bands like Pretty Girls Make Graves. - G S

THE PROMISE - *Believer* (Indecision Records, PO Box 6052, Garden Grove, CA 92846) Hot on the heels of a promising, albeit terse, EP on Deathwish records, upstate New York's The Promise unveil a full length endeavor that far supercedes their earlier output in terms of both presentation and stylistic drive. Where first this veteran cast comprised of ex-members of seemed to focus on brooding, mid-tempo metal-tinged dirges, a robust infusion of both searing melodic undertones and gritty speed on this new outing provides a much welcomed elaboration on what was already a formidable musical approach. Blazing, shout along strewn anthems, and an excellent knack for both crushing riff carnage and intricate yet harmonic gloom ridden fret rending pervade this work. There is an emphasis on the technical prowess infused into the old school hardcore melee presented here, occasionally singed with hints of metallic know how. Indeed, a mighty punch is packed by each distinct song here, and the rhythmic builds and breakdowns crammed into every walloping number complements the fray quite nicely. It becomes quickly apparent that the viewpoints voiced on this record are those of weathered survivor and veterans of a scene that has, through thick and thin, fostered growth, and also provided a forum for insight , reflection, and, as portrayed numerous times on this record, scathing criticism. Unique to this outfit is a lyrical scheme that, from top to bottom, focuses exclusively on the hardcore scene and the concept of straight edge which this unit doggedly embraces. Tried and true criticisms of scene cliquishness, flagrant materialism, hollow rhetoric touting, empty sloganeering, insincerity, and disillusionment are voiced with so forceful and compelling a delivery as to be surprisingly vital, even in light of innumerable likeminded rants over the years. It is especially gratifying to see a group of people who have been involved in hardcore for a lengthy span of time offer a novel, wholly sincere musical excursion that ultimately proves far more powerful and fresh than much of what a newer generation has had to offer as of late. This is very good record throughout, highly recommended. - Mike Ramek

PROVAN -- "The Conquering Pain Act" EP (Edna Records, 62 N. 7th St. #2L, Brooklyn NY 11211) Punchy, catchy, literate, well-crafted pop here, with some cool guitar tones and lots of neat backup vocals. Bassist Bill Lutz used to write for Jersey Beat, and I suspect everybody in this band has big record collections and good taste. I hear hints here of everything from Pavement to Squeeze to Weezer to Yo La Tengo and then some, although lead singer/guitarist Mike Keaney has a distinctive and pleasing voice all his own. "Kid On A Stick" is the best song about a fan that I've ever heard. This is yummy but I wish there were more. Where have these guys been hiding? Surely not at home -- how does a band this good not get noticed in Williamsburg? – Jim Testa

PULASKI – *P.U.L.A.S.K.I.* (amBiguous City Records) Anyone jonesing for the Dead Milkmen will delight in the newest release from Baltimore's Pulaski. This is jokey punk with both funny jokes and great punk rock. Crisp, catchy melodies, cool harmonies, and the funny lyrics provide head-bobbing amusement from stop to finish, and it comes with a full-color comic book that depicts that band members as wise-ass anti-superheroes (in the tradition of The Tick). Rock 'n' roll and comic books – you've got 2/3 of my childhood right here on this disc! - Jim Testa

PUNCHBUGGY – *The Great Divide* (Does Everyone Stare? PO Box 1006, Edison, NJ, 08818) Does Everyone Stare? has the melodic Canadian pop-punk market cornered; now offering up the fourth album from Ottawa's Punchbuggy. If anything, *The Great Divide* shows how powerful an influence Montreal's the Doughboys has on all things Canadian pop punk. Punchbuggy's album opener, "Same," sounds dead ringer to *Crush*-era Doughboys, with an uncanny replica guitar sound and those harmonized vocals that automatically force to mind the image of headbanging dreadlocks (visualize members of the Doughboys and instantly understand). By a few songs in, Punchbuggy carve out elements of their own, well... punchier sound but it never strays too far from the unmistakable refrains of Canadian pop punk. Let's coin it "beaver-core," shall we? - Jason Schreurs

PUNCHLINE – "The Rewind EP" (Fueled By Ramen, PO Box 12563, Gainseville FL, 32604) When you open your copy of Punchline's "The Rewind EP" the first thing you see is the phrase, "Simply put. This is the soundtrack to my brain." Now if that's not enough to make you regret your purchase right off the bat, try the song titles that have symbols instead of titles or the running times of their ditties (the last song clocking in at an epic 8:37!!!). Any sane person would immediately run this disc back to their record store and trade it in for the new Sum 41 album or some such and be done with the whole affair. But thankfully I did not pay for this record so I soldiered on. If you can get past the packaging I think you will be pleasantly surprised at the music Punchline make. Yeah there's some emo in there, some synth thrown in but there's some great guitar leads and very competent vocals to be found as well. Now if they would only trim their songs they could get down to the business of making some serious bread off their endeaor. - Oliver Lyons

THE RACE - *Perfect Gift* (Flameshovel Records, 1658 N. Milwaukee #276, Chicago, IL 60647) This is a new take on the post-rock thing. There's hints of jazz-ish influence, though this is definitely pop, not jazz. The melodies and rhythms are untraditional, a little off kilter, kind of angular, but not shockingly so. This is a refreshingly original disc, too, which always tends to drive away boredom. The songs are varied, sometimes jolting, sometimes flowing, but always with a distintly different sound and attitude. Very cool stuff. Recommended. - Paul Silver

RACE FOR TITLES (The Redemption Recording Co., PO Box 10238, Beverly Hills, CA 90213) As I listened to the opening chords and lyrical presence of James Massey on the song "Am/Pm," I had the sinking feeling that I was about to be treated to yet another band playing overly emotional indie rock that followed a well worn formula. However, almost instantaneously, Race for Titles proved to be an act that went against the more common styles to produce dark, moody dual guitar rock that was stylish and impressive. In addition to twisting their sound into more ambient spaces, the band's songs are accented by minimal, yet earnest lyrics. "We Can Start Here," "Jackson," "Static Online" and "Third Passenger" are all harrowing tales of relationship woe delivered with intimacy and compelling passion as Race For Titles use quiet/loud dynamics, but do so with unexpected twists. The disc seemed to get better with each passing track, and while the guitar work is solid, the percussion skill of Matt Bowen cannot be overlookd. Go find this. - Rich Quinlan

RAINER MARIA – *Long Knives Drawn* (Polyvinyl Records) Like X, Jawbox, the Poster Children and, I guess, the White Stripes before them, the dynamics of Rainer Maria have dramatically changed from a group wherein two lovers melded their personalities into song, to a group where two ex-lovers continue to create music together after their personal relationship has fallen apart. It's a weird soap-opera environment to make art in – I remember asking J Robbins of Jawbox once how he kept the band together after bassist Kim Colletta dumped him and started living with second guitarist Bill Barbot, and he just shrugged and said, "the music was too important to stop." On *Long Knives Drawn,* singer/bassist Caithlin de Marrais confronts her estrangement from guitarist Kyle Fischer by asserting her personality and blossoming from a poetess-who-sings into a full-fledged rock diva. Fischer's intricate vocal interplay and shared lead vocals have all but disappeared on this release; instead, de Marrais belts out all the lead vocals like an age-of-emo Deborah Harry. The songs rock louder, brasher, and harder than anything Rainer Maria has done before. I miss the rainy day comfort and coziness of the old Rainer Maria; but if emo lacks one thing, it's a strong female lead singer, and the genre's finally got one in de Marrais. Rumor has it that this will probably be the band's last release together; but hey, they said that about Sonny & Cher too. In any event, I'll be waiting for Caithlin de Marrais' solo CD. – Jim Testa

RATOS DE PORAO – *Onisciente Coletive* (Alternative Tentacles Records, PO Box 419092, San Francisco, CA, 94141-9092) Those who paid attention to the late-'80s Brazilian thrash metal scene when Sepultura were first taking the world by storm might remember Ratos de Porao. Yep, after more than 20 years, Ratos are still swinging, and still cranking out 1000 mph thrash grind punk. As Sepultura went the path of mainstream metal, the other notable Sao Paulo thrash group stayed underground and seeping with angry, political grind. *Onisciente Coletive* is probably Ratos' most venomous record to date, lambasting the Brazilian government for its treatment of the Brazilian poor and taking potshots at the US for their constant world bullying. Complete with pissed-off translations to their lyrics (which are sung entirely in Brazilian), smart explanations for all their songs, and a heartbreaking photo of Brazilian aboriginals scarfing McDonald's food, this album makes you think as much as it makes you want to bang your head against the nearest brick wall. Some of the best thrash in recent years, making the latest Sepultura output look more than a little stinky. - Jason Schreurs

REBREATHER - *Need Another Seven Astronauts* (2002 Infernal Racket Records, Po Box 4641 Bethlehem, PA 18018) First off, I must admit that the title here made me laugh out loud (it's the punch line from a sick joke which emerged after the space shuttle *Challenger* explosion-ask your parents, kids), but there is nothing amusing about Rebreather's sound. This disc features five lengthy, pummeling tracks of sludge-rock that may be compared to stoner-metal, but this may scare the stoners too much. "Earthmover" is a nightmarish, teeth-rattling concoction of distorted rhythms and a brooding, Sabbath cum Tool-like stomp. The same holds true for the provocatively titled "Joy Bang", as it bleeds into "Pushing the Lights" a song whose poetic lyrics stand in direct contrast with the furious intensity of the playing, making it my personal favorite. With not one second wasted, even between songs, you have the sensation that *Need Another Seven Astronauts* is one non-stop wave of sonic force that never lets you catch your breath. The meandering death march pacing of the nearly fourteen minute "Ropeladder/Seedspreader" embodies the sheer power of the band. When you conjure up images of heavy music, speed does not always make the band. This will remind you why heavy metal used to frighten people, and how, when a band really tones down the guitar and screams out the lyrics, it still has the ability to both disturb and provoke. Find this immediately! - Rich Quinlan

THE RED AND THE BLACK – "Plans For Next Year" EP (The Self-Starter Foundation, P.O. Box 1562, New York, NY 10276, www.theredandtheblack.com) I received this while re-reading Stendhal's book of the same name and was hoping I could link the two together like some hippie-types do with Darkside of the Moon and The Wizard of Oz, but The Red and the Black aren't epic or sprawling like Stendhal's text about fucked-up Romanticism in 19th century France. Not epic, no, but okay. And, I guess, to be fair, kind of romantic. The band - featuring ex-members of Haywood and Huffy - opts for pretty familiar dynamic-laden (i.e.: the loud/soft thing) rock. I was thinking of a less spastic Superchunk or a more spastic Seam, but Tim Lauben has a smokier voice than Mac McCaughan or Sooyoung Park, and most of the time there are two folks shouting together, which pushes things into the territory of anthemic sing-a-long - dare I say? - emo. The five modest songs on Plans For Next Year are supposedly a cycle about a failed relationship, but since folks ho make hook-centric indie rock most often tread water in a "he/she left me and now I remember the little things" template, affixing an operatic narrative wasn't necessary. I'd be more impressed with a cycle about Libertarian Communism or Stendhal. -Brandon Stosuy

THE RED HOT VALENTINES - *Calling Off Today* (Polyvinyl Records, PO Box 7140, Champaign, IL 61826-7140) Middle -of-the-road synth rock with an emo tinge. One of eight million other bands just like this in the great USA. If you care that much than by all means...enjoy. - Oliver Lyons

REGGIE AND THE FULL EFFECT – *Under the Tray* (Vagrant Records) With members of The Get Up Kids in disguise all playing different instruments, Reggie's second album is free of the emo trappings of the Get Up's and the members find themselves able to go in all different directions. Every song on Under the Tray is completely different from the proceeding ones. You get synth-rock, European disco, nu metal, novelty songs and death metal. Nothing goes together, nothing makes sense but everything rocks. This is the first record you need to own in 2003!- Oliver Lyons

RETISONIC – "gLean Beat "h 6-song CD-EP (Silverthree Sound Recordings, PO Box 3621, Fairfax, VA 22038) Like many, I was dismayed to hear of the demise of Bluetip, a band that I believed was the anchor of the Dischord stable. However, Jason Farrell was not idle for long, snagging Garden Variety's Joe Gorelick to form the bombastic Retisonic. Emphasis should be placed on the "sonic" part of their name, for all of the six tracks on Lean Beat are pounding, aggressive efforts that, much like Farrell's earlier work, have an uncanny combination of blunt force and melodic hooks. "Malaligned" nods toward punk noise and fury while also possessing a chorus that will win the favor of all rock fans. The multifaceted nature of the band helps to make "gLean Beat "h sound so fresh, as "Filthy Way to Lose Yourself" crisply bounces with energy, and "First Night of a Year Long Mistake" has a warm acoustic intro before surrendering to the power generated by the intricate guitar/drum interplay of these two gifted musicians. Fans of Garden Variety well remember the percussion that helped to shape that band's sound, and that characteristic is heard throughout the disc, possibly most perfectly on the rugged "Take Your Gun and Hide". With only subtle bass lines contributed by Dave Stern, Retisonic is truly a two-man show, and the result is astounding, summed up by the unfettered blast of the closing "Unrepentant." Go find this. - Rich Quinlan

THE REUNION SHOW - *Kill Your Television* (Victory Records) Ok, name three contemporary bands from Long Island. How about two? One? Give up? How about Glassjaw, Taking Back Sunday, and newcomers The Reunion Show? (Don't feel bad, I'd have a hard time also). I guess my point is, great music can happen anywhere. "Kill Your Television" is a blend of Pop, Punk, and straight ahead rock, fused with alluring keyboard melodies. They use a Moog organ (like The Berlin Project), along with catchy, irresistible dual harmonies. "Television," "Love Trap," or "Dedication" are anthem laden rock songs! - Phil Rainone

RISE AGAINST – Revolutions Per Minute (Fat Wreck Chords) After the umpteenth breakup of 88 Fingers Louie turned out to be the final one, a couple of those dudes took no time in forming Rise Against. Like 88FL, Rise Against plays a melodic style of hardcore, mixing Bad Religion-like precision with a Midwestern bite. Like their former band, Rise Against spend twice as much time in the studio than most punk bands, this time recording with All's Bill Stevenson and veteran engineer Jason Livermore at The Blasting Room in Colorado (Zeke, Good Riddance). The band is tight and the production is awesome, but geez, this must have cost a fortune. – Johnny Puke

RISK RELAY – *Low Frequency Listener* (Ernest Jenning Record Co., 68 Cheever Pl. #2, Bklyn NY 11231) We seem to be hearing more and more bands like this lately, inspired by British minimalists like Wire and The Fall into creating angular post-punk that relies more on staccato riffs and stylized guitar & synthesizer tones at the expense of traditional pop-songwriting staples like melody and verse/chorus/verse song structures. Risk Relay do a good job with the tones, the angsty screamed vocals, and the grinding beats. What they lack is a groove, and more importantly, emotion. There is a difference between being a technician and a musician; Risk Relay are fine technicians, but I don't hear a heart beating behind the synthesizers. "The Hub City," which apocalyptically forecasts the destruction of the band's hometown of New Brunswick, should be chilling and foreboding; it's not. A song title like "Do Not Speak Directly Into The Microphone" at least hints at a spark of humor. Imagine what the Ex Models could do with a song title like that! But Risk Relay doesn't even raise an eyebrow's worth of ironic bemusement. Kevin Dailey's lead vocals are emphatic, didactic, articulate; but not communicative. Who cares what he's saying if you can't tell what he feels? Risk Relay needs to work with a producer like Eli Janney (there's a certain affinity in sound between RR and GvsB anyway) who can pump a little soul into the machine. – Al Head

PICK HIT: Rye Coalition

RIVER CITY REBELS - *No Good, No Time, No Pride* (Victory Records) For three albums now, the River City Rebels have been shouting their anthems of the working class, and small town pride with jaw dropping results. On this release they show some maturity in the lyrics (racism and freedom are main topics), but still are capable of sounding like a ragtag band of punk rock misfits, playing raucous old school punk. They have a diverse and solid following, as was evident when we saw them earlier this year with labelmates Ten Foot Pole and Voodoo Glow Skulls (both bands were great), at Krome in South Amboy. The Rebels premiered a few new songs including "Aborted." Lead singer Dan O'Day said the song was about comments his parents had made to him at some point in his life. His speech and the song made me feel his anger, hatred, and pride all at once. -It's a riviting song! Throughout the album the fist pumping choruses and sing-a-longs bounce between the ragged horn section, explosive guitar riffs, and solid rhythm section that is the backbone of the Rebels. The River City Rebels put their heart and soul into their music, and give punk rock the kick in the pants it sorely needs! - Phil Rainone

ROCK KILLS KID EP (Fearless Records) The debut EP from Rock Kills Kid (sounds like a name ripped from a newspaper headline), is just what's needed to shake the Winter (or any season), blues. God knows I've got 'cabin fever,' being cramped-up in this cabin (NJ Transit), high above the scenic Raritan River, so I'm blasting this disc in hopes of shaking things up a bit! Anyway, before I get too carried away, on all six songs a pair of sharp guitar chords alternate gracefully with dual lead vocals, giving the songs a slinky and spiky sound all at the same time. Catchy, sing-a-long tunes that are sure to get you out of any kind of funk, and up on your feet! - Phil Rainone

ROCKET FROM THE CRYPT – *Live From Camp X-Ray* (Vagrant) Man, you gotta hand it to John Reis. As a musician, this guy has the dream life. Through the popularity of RFTC, he's got his own label and he's a songwriting whiz able to indulge his various whims through at least three bands, all of whom have enough activity to each be players in their respective punk sub-genres (Drive Like Jehu, The Hot Snakes, and RFTC.) But Rocket From The Crypt is where Reis really shines, at the helm of this horn-assisted punk, rock, and roll battleship with big vocals and big guitars. *Live From Camp X-Ray* is a testament to the band's greatness. Perhaps misnamed, this is not a live album at all, but ten rockin' brand-new studio tracks with excellent production, given the songs the punch they need. Lyrics are totally besides the point with Rocket songs; for example, "Bucket of piss, bucket of piss, make yourself useful like a bucket of piss." But who cares? Highly recommended. – Johnny Puke

THE ROCKET SUMMER - *Calendar Days* (The Militia Group, 7923 Warner Ave, Suite K, Huntington Beach CA 92647) The hype on this album is worth believing. The long-story short: Bryce Avary is still a teenager and played every instrument on the Ed Rose-recorded Calendar Days, which is essentially an innocently-fun power-pop album. No emo here, thankfully. –Darren Paltrowitz

RONDELLUS - *Sabbatum -- A Medieval Tribute to Black Sabbath* (The Music Cartel) If you close your eyes while listening to this CD, you can pick up a lot of the Ozzy Osbourne vocal inflections that made Black Sabbath classics like "War Pigs" and "Behind the Wall of Sleep" so wonderful. This CD reminds me a lot of Apocalyptica, the group that play songs by Metallica, Pantera, and other metal acts on the cello, in the sense that I am developing a deeper appreciation for classical music. It used to be that classical music was elevator music for me. Even my Introduction to Music class in college didn't develop my appreciation for the genre. So if you are weary of trying this CD out, perhaps try Apocalyptica first, then slip this CD in. The s tand out tracks for me are "War Pigs" and "Planet Caravan", both from the Paranoid release, mainly because that was the first Sabbath release I ever heard. I don't understand Latin, but I dug this release. - Paul Hanson

ROTTEN APPLES - ‟gReal-Tuff ‟h/ ‟hDurable Plastic ‟h EP (Empty Records) Poppy girl punk with a Joan Jett attitude and sound. The lead singer/song writer, Dejha Clayton, seductively growls with the best of them as she vents her frustrations against lovers, bad drivers and a plastic world. So much girl rock that is tossed upon the masses lis lame – these girls (and one guy) don't go down that path. Get this – it's accessible but you can't help but love the defiant attitude. – Tom Brebric

THE RUMBLERS - *Hold On Tight* (Switchblade Records PO Box 266 Pedricktown, NJ 08067) From the cover of this album, I thought these guys were a rockabilly band. Then upon looking at the insert, I assumed they were a garage rock band with a 50's shtick. But from actually listening to the CD, it turns out they're a pretty lousy pop-punk band. Who knew? - Oliver Lyons

RYE COALITION – "Jersey Girls" 7-song CD-EP (Tiger Style, 401 Broadway, 26th Floor, NYC 10013) The silly song titles ("Communication Breakdance," "Stop Eating While I'm Smoking," "Speed Metal Tap Dancer") tell you that these pug-ugly Jersey City slobs don't take themselves too seriously, but there's nothing frivolous about the way they rock. There's nothing fancy about the formula, either; just greasy gutpunch AC/DC raunch with big fat riffs and bug-eyed vocals. You get four new tunes here, the "ZZ Topless"/"Snow Job" 7-inch, and "Stop Eating While I'm Smoking" from the excellent On Top CD. The enhanced CD also includes a cool animated flash video for "Smoking" with giant transformer robots, Satan, and some nifty "Yellow Submarine" psychedelia. – Jim Testa

THE SCARIES - *Souvenir* (Law of Inertia Records) Hey, some fellow North Carolina boys! Uh, oh... They're from Chapel Hill.... that usually spells trouble. Ok, let's spin it...... Certainly not your typical Chapel Hill affair. Pretty straightforward pop-punk, actually. Well written and superbly executed but unless your an avid pop-punker then nothing to write home to mama about. They have their moments (notably "Revolvers" and "Disappointed"), but for the most part they fall victim to the usual cliche chord progressions and other pop -punkisms that hundreds of other bands of this ilk churn out all over the world. Not bad, not great. - Eric Walls

SCISSORFIGHT – ‟gPotential New Agent for Unconventional Warfare ‟h EP (Tortuga Recordings) The music is hard, catchy, with some heavy power riffs. A cool blend of alt. and bastardized blues rock. Listening to Scissorfight will leave a ringing in your ears (and that's a good thing)! I'd take these 5 songs over an albums worth of watered-down alt. rock (Coldplay, Puddle of Mud, etc.), any day. Scissorfight wins hands down for their originality and passion for music. - Phil Rainone

THE SECESSION MOVEMENT – We Need A Hill (Keep Safe Records, 1016 Berlin Rd. Cherry Hill NJ 08034) The Secession Movement fascinates, intrigues, at times even captivates me. The formula on this latest full-length remains the same: Math-rock time signatures, impressively technical guitar and bass parts, unorthodox chord progressions and guitar sounds, and Dave Downham's acrobatic, tortured vocals combine for a unique sound, somewhere in between Sonic Youth, the Dismemberment Plan, and any one of those Midwestern math-rock emo acts. Unlike its predecessors, though, We Need A Hill lacks a sense of fun. Every song here is resolutely downbeat and somber, from the moody instrumentals to the frenetic, quick-tempo'd tunes. The more I listened to this CD, the more I heard going on; but I longed for just one of the smiles wrought by the band's last CD, Akedemic. That said, this is still an impressive work, recommended for anyone who enjoys wallowing in misery, either their own or others'. – Jim Testa

SEETHER – 5-song EP (Wind-up Entertainment, 72 Madison Ave., 8th Fl, NYC 10016-Seether.com) I don't know about the rest of you out there, but I have never had a soft spot for the band riding the coattails of bands already riding coattails. Really, depending on which track you heard on the radio, you would have no trouble imagining a DJ following it with, "That was the latest from Creed." Or Bush. Or Pearl Jam. You get the idea. These guys are already on the radio so maybe they'll make it on the magic coattail ride, but I can't bring myself to champion a band exercising zero energy to set itself apart from the herd. A note to you other wannabe's out there: It's great that chameleons can blend in, but they do that to NOT get noticed ‟c - Mike Chant

SHELL SHOCK – EP (c/o Scott Horton, 11 Covert St, Montrose, NY 10548). All right, 5 songs, 10 minutes, can't beat it. Four-piece band playing their own brand (not really) of old school H/C mixed with some other elements. Nothing new, just rehashing old ideas, but not doing them any justice. – Phil Pinto

THE SHIPPING NEWS - *Three-Four* (Quarterstick, PO Box 25342, Chicago, IL 60625) This record is the culmination of a wholly new method of recording. The three members of Shipping News, Kyle Crabtree, Jeff Mueller and Jason Noble, all challenged each other to record a song completely solo (although that did not always happen) as an addendum to a series of EPs. Those three releases, "Carrier", "Sickening Bridge" and "Variegated" have been placed on this disc and remastered a bit. What you come away with is a collection of tracks that all retain a sense of individuality, based on the member to whom the songs were credited. I was most impressed with the work of Jason Noble, as "Paper Lanterns'" throbbing bass line and the driving "Architect in Hell" were among the best efforts of *Three-Four.* There is a beautiful darkness that emanates throughout the record, as a sense of lush atmospheric aesthetic highlight "Variegated" "We Start To Drift", "Wax Museum" and "Haunted on Foot". One of the most memorable of the bunch was "Cock-a-doodle-doo", a song with a vehemently loud/quiet dynamic that captures the essence of indie rock and has a great sequence of samples that close the track. This is matched by the raw,start/stop sound of "Haymaker" and the guitar noise of "You Can't Hide the Mark Inside." In the end, you are given insight into the individual and collective skills of a band that ahs the ability to shift musical gears and formulate a variety of intricate pieces that stand alone as well as they do together. - Rich Quinlan

SHUTDOWN - *1990-1995* (Boss Tuneage, PO BOX 74, Sandy Beds SG19 2WB UK) As detailed in this succinct retrospective release, the UK-based Shutdown (not to be confused with the Brooklyn-based Shutdown of the same era) were certainly not one of the more formidable or vital bands that surfaced within the mid-to-late ‟es youth crew revival, nor the slightly later ‟gemo-core ‟h revival, either. A string of flat, middling tunes here certainly don ‟ft appeal to me nearly as much as even the output of many comparatively mediocre melody-laden bands of that era did, let alone the work of bands such as Fastbreak or the influential Lifetime. The amalgam of hum drum hooks and predictable channeled aggression is wholly unremarkable, and offers little in terms of unique songwriting or form. That being said, Shutdown are mostly listenable, and amid a somewhat flat and structurally unremarkable legacy, provide a decent amount of energy and enthusiasm. Even so, this release is anything but essential. – Mike Ramek

SICK OF IT ALL - *Live in a Dive* (Fat Wreck Chords) Recorded at The Bottom of the Hill (state ?), last year, Sick of it All captures their essential hard-core anthems ("Call to Arms," "Blown Away," etc.), hits, and classics in a live, energetic and communal show. We saw the band this past year at Birch Hill. The show was one of the best we had seen at the venue. This live disc contains all the brutal authenticity of that show. On songs like "Scratch the Surface," & "America," & "Rat Pack," you can feel the powerful, hard vibe the band generates. During one song lead singer Lou points out that, "Punk was not available at the Mall, wasn't cute, or about fashion years ago. It was an attitude, a way of life." To hammer home his point, the band slams into "Disco Sucks, Fuck Everything." You can almost feel the intensity between the band and their appreciative fans. - Phil Rainone

SIDECAR - *You're Killing Me* (Three Mileage Records 381 Broadway, 4th Floor Suite 3 New York City, NY 10013) Sidecar play incredibly melodic punk that dances on the edge of pop without converting entirely to bubblegum aesthetics. The record is a slickly produced, skillfully played disc that embraces punk roots while also allowing itself to be commercially viable. The band addresses a variety of issues with varying levels of seriousness, from the more mature "Hide the Murder Weapon", "Something Left Inside", "No Call for Action" and "Pretty Submissive" to the more tongue in cheek anthem, "I've Finally Become the Asshole I Always Wanted to Be". The two-guitar line up of Sidecar gives *You're Killing Me* a thicker sound, but I still was hoping to hear a more abrasive assault. While I was impressed with some of this, the sad truth remained that the best track of the lot was a cover. Sidecar treats you to a hidden bonus; a complete re-working of Queen's immortal "We Will Rock You". The band turns this arena shaking classic into a smartly paced, punk-pop gem. The only struggle here is that you do have to get through fourteen songs before you hear this, and in the end, I do not know if it was worth it. - Rich Quinlan

SILVERTIDE – "American Excess" EP (Jive Records) Pennsylvania's Silvertide were signed with great fanfare as the lynchpin of Clive Davis' move to transform Jive Records reputation as a boy-band and R&B label by adding a strong rock roster. Jive even paid for a chartered bus trip that took me and some industry people from NYC to see the band showcase in Philadelphia. This debut EP failed to make any waves at all though, and it's not surprising; Silvertide are retro in a depressingly predictable way, with skinny shirtless frontman Walt Lafty channeling Chris Robinson's white funk yowl while the rest of the band (including Slash lookalike Nick Perri on lead guitar) thrashes out stale Aerosmith-style 70's hard-rock. File under "Tax Writeoff" and forget. – Jim Testa

SIMON'S AWAKE - *The Hundreth Monkey Phenomenon* (www.simonsawake.com) This is the kind of stuff I hear when I'm walking by the local frat bars. That's usually a sure "not good" sign in my book and sure enough I found myself not enjoying this CD very much at all. Yeah, these guys handle their repspective axes well enough (nothing spectactular, mind you, but adequate), but fail to this ear to hit on anything worth mentioning. Modern, pop, alternative, rock, whatever you want to call it these guys write 'em plain and simple and are sure to be at the top of the New Rock stations playlist soon as by what I hear cramming the airwaves that ‟fs about exactly what they're looking for. Haven't I heard these songs somewhere before........... ???? - Eric Walls

SIMPLE PLAN - *No Pads, No Helmets... Just Balls* (Lava/Atlantic) Simple Plan are one of those nice surprises that come along once in a great while! They were recently featured on this years Warped Tour, and were one of the outstanding bands, from what I'm told. Simple Plan is an emo/pop band that turns out catchy, sing a long pop/rock tunes. Songs like "God Must Hate Me" & "I Won't be There," or "One Day" capture the day to day feelings and frustrations of what a teenager goes through to try be in control of their own lives. "Perfect" is a story of a teen's letter to their Father. It deals with the parent's expectations, and how the son/daughter tries to live up to them. The song captures the moment and the feeling of what it's like to try to be something you not. Sometimes it helps to remember what it was like to be that age again. - Phil Rainone

DAVID SINGER & THE SWEET SCIENCE (Deep Elm Records, PO Box 36939, Charlotte, NC 28236, www.deepelm.com) This reminds me of the overblown pop music of the 70s, from folks like the Beatles, Elton John, the Moody Blues, and so on. It all kind of drags, and just turns me off. Sorry. - Paul Silver

THE SKULLS – *Therapy For The Shy* (Dr. Strange, PO Box 1058, Alta Loma CA 91701) Billy Bones and the original Skulls were – or so I'm told – a force in the late 70's L.A. scene that gave us the Germs, the Bags, and the Weirdos. He's reformed the band with an 18-year old tyro on guitar and some other scene vets and the results are nothing short of a Molotov cocktail of fire-breathing punk. You can hear echoes here of everything from the Stooges to Generation X to the Sex Pistols, as hedonistic rock 'n' roll clashes with a populist political agenda (remember when punk was about politics?), as when Bones tells us in no uncertain terms, "Life ain't so pretty / the rich have no pity." Never mind the bollocks, find yourself a copy of this and rock until your brains fall out. – Jim Testa

THE SLATS - *The Great Plains of San Francisco* (The Tyros Label) When was the last time you heard a record that was fun AND intelligent AND challenging? Sure, doing doughnuts in the 7-11 parking lot with Queens of The Stone Age cranked up to 11 is fun and all, but it gets old quick and leaves you wanting something more than just visceral energy. Dissecting every time change and textural track on the new Mogwai album can be interesting, but when was the last time that 13/8 time rocked you to your core? Need New Body may challenge your conception of what a "song" is, but after a while you find yourself begging for something, anything resembling a melody. My point is that there are several bands out there that do ONE thing and do it well, but it's getting harder and harder to find a band willing to go out on a limb and try combining two or even (gasp) three styles and approaches. Perhaps independent music has become so Balkanized that bands today feel a need to fit in to just one of the myriad of genres and sub genres that have arisen since The VelvetUnderground created this big old wonderful animal that we call underground rock music. But wouldn't it be refreshing if there was a band that, when asked what type of music they played, instead "Emo" or "Screamo" or "Math-Rock" or "Stoner-Rock", answered unabashedly, unironically, and unashamedly, "We play Rock n' Roll music"? The Slats are one of the only bands I am aware of that can puff out their chests, hold their heads high, and say "We are a Rock n' Roll band" and mean it in the most basic and truest sense. They play music that is basic, sophisticated, subtle, crude, smart, fun, aggressive, sensitive, pretty, dissonant, angular, and catchy. They embody the blend of intellect and libido that defines good Rock n' Roll, and seems to be missing in today's independent music scene. Stripping it down to two guitars, drums, and vocals (with the occasional bass and/or keyboard), the Slats are deceptively simple sounding, and if you listen just at a surface level, you'll hear catchy, upbeat, go for the throat, rock n' roll. But if you listen closer, you'll realize that the starts and stops that sound random and chaotic at first are perfectly placed to add tension and space in all the right parts of the songs. Then you'll notice that the dissonant lead guitar lines on top of the chugging or strummed rhythm guitar not only add to the texture of the chords, but are also downright catchy. On top of all of this are some of the smartest lyrics I've heard in a long time, housed in incredibly catchy melodies, and delivered in a great Robert Pollard meets Mark Mothersbaugh style. The Slats embody the "anything goes" principle more than any band since Pavement. In fact, *The Great Plains of San Francisco* made me nostalgic for the glory days of the mid 90's, when a band could be catchy and strange, pretty and dissonant, rocking and smart, all at the same time, instead of being just one of those things at the sacrifice of all the others. -Daniel Madri

SLIGHTLY STOOPID - *Everything You Need* (Surfdog Records www.surfdog.com) Holy Shit! College album of the year if there ever was one! Discovered by the dead guy from Sublime, this two piece from California make music that's not all that dissimilar to...Sublime! (shockola!) Guitar driven funk with some hip-hop and reggae elements attached to it. Perfect for white kids too terrified to buy the real stuff as the soundtrack for your next frat party, or hackey-sack game, or date rape or whatever it is you kids who go to real colleges do. Hell if I know, I went to art school! - Oliver Lyons

SLOW GHERKIN - *Run Screaming* (Asian Man Records) Sometimes ignorance is not bliss. Slow Gherkin has ben around for ten years, and this is the first time I've heard them. Their sound is rooted in rock and soul, but there's also a cool blend of punk and ska in their music. The opening song "He's Gotta Go," is fresh, energetic, and wets your appetite for the rest of the album. All the songs are danceable, and paint an infectious backdrop for the more serious lyrics about love, family, and growing up. I may not have know where they've been, but I have a good idea where they are headed. Buy their album, see 'em live and let me know if I'm right. Better late than never. - Phil Rainone

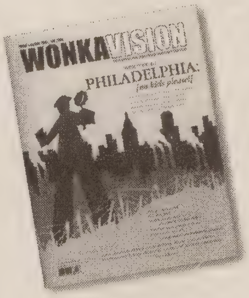
SMALL BROWN BIKE / THE CASKET LOTTERY Split CD-EP (Second Nature Recordings, PO Box 11543, Kansas City, MO 64138) This isn't another split release of throwaway songs, but a six-song collaborative effort in the truest sense, ‘h says the bio sheet accompanying this record. It is true that this CD finds both bands working together on most of the songs. I think that out of the six tracks, each band has only one that is theirs in its entirety. I seem to like what I believe to be The Casket Lottery parts more than the Small Brown Bike parts, though both of these bands are riding the emo shuttle to technical, post-punk feelings-core. The Casket Lottery uses a lot of imagery which is not necessarily interesting, but is a nice break from the monotonous words shouted by most bands. The music on this record would pass a government issued standardized indie-rock test, however would not, by virtue of its scores, be placed in honors courses. Though it ‘f's not my favorite genre, it sounds like both of these bands put a lot of work into this record. – Joel Roston

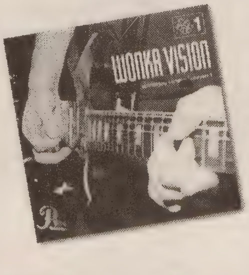
SNOWDOGS - *Deep Cuts, Fast Remedies* (Victory Records) The Snowdogs are one of the few bands that can play ultra catchy music, while successfully avoiding the goofiness and sappiness that some other pop-punk bands fall into. The writing and hyper-infectious hooks (featuring keyboards, horns, and harmonica), capture the band's energy and vibrancy Snowdogs don't beat around the bush with irony or being evasive. They get right to the point (check "Average Kid," "Freedom for Everyone," or "Your Sorry Ass"). Their cover of Paul Simon's "Boy in the Bubble" is tighter, and they make the song more relevant than the original. When Ville Leppanen sings lines like "Every generation throws a hero up the Pop charts," you feel his narsistic intensity. - Phil Rainone

SOLACE – *13* (MeteorCity Records, P. O. Box 40322, Albuquerque, NM 87196). Man, this is one the best albums I have heard in a long-ass time, for Stoner Rock at least. Twelve tracks of pure sonic doom, thunder-heavy drums, and soaring-high vocals to have banging your head instantly. The album's opener "Loving Sickness/Burning Fuel" sets an up-beat mood that lasts throughout the entire CD. Of course there are a few tracks that are very blues-influenced, but still very heavy. The song "Common Cause" was co-written and features Wino (The Obsessed, Spirit Caravan) as well as two cover songs, Pentagram's "Forever My Queen" and Agnostic Front's "With Time." The Pentagram cover is not all that great, but the A.F. one fuckin rocks. It was also a bit of shocker that they would cover an A.F. song, but this is one of those bands that can do no wrong. Lots of effects on the guitars, a good use of noises, and a perfect blend of low and high vocals make this a release sure to have you humming the melodies after you get done hearing it. – Phil Pinto

SOMEHOW HOLLOW - *Busted Wings & Rusted Halos* (Victory Records) Sporting such riff-driven winners as the angst fueled "Busted Stereos and Myself," the pop-crunch of "Broken Chords," and the engaging hook-filled "Kamloops," Somehow Hollow comes across as a tight-knit melodic punk band. (Hopefully I've used enough adjective to get the idea across that every song documents the band's passion for great songs)! You'll also find wise-ass anger and metallic influences in the music. The best compliment I can give a band is, buy their CD than see them live. That advice definitely applies here. - Phil Rainone

SPARKS FLY FROM A KISS / HOPE, STAR, AND BROWNING - "I Can ‘ft Sleep" b/w "We'll Make It Somehow" Split 7-inch EP (lowcityrecords.com) I thought this was a joke upon first listening. With a repetitive, annoying guitar riff, bubbly keyboards and flat vocals, there are no sparks flying anywhere on this track. "I Can't Sleep" is an incredibly boring song that sounds as if you would hear it at a Middle School talent show. The US could use this song to torture accused terrorists into giving up secrets. Calling this dreadful is too polite. The tempo did not pick up on the second side with the accordian driven "We'll Make It Somehow" from Hope, Star and Browning. The recording was intentionally lo-fi, I'm assuming, but this simply needs to be ignored and forgotten. I do not know who would listen to this, as it sounds like Grade D folk with cheesy accordian and off-kilter drumming as musical accompaniment. I wasted ten minutes of life listening to this drivel. - Rich Quinlan





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SPEED CRAZY – "Chicken Fried Valentine" EP (www.njspeedcrazy.com) Two comments about rockabilly: It's one of the offshoots of punk that actually requires chops to pull off properly, and it's a musical sub-genre that lends itself to cross-pollination with other kinds of music. The NJ trio Speed Crazy acquits themselves on both counts on this EP; the guitars, bass, and drums all have the technical prowess to pull off the nimble-fingered licks and rapid tempos. The five songs on this EP also cleverly mix 'n' match the band's core psychobilly sound with other styles; the title track has a trashy country vibe, other cuts mix in some swing and heavy death-metal riffs, and there's even a flamenco-flavored track in Spanish. They may not be the Brian Setzer Orchestra, but Speed Crazy definitely has that real gone sound going on. – Jim Testa

SPENGLER - *We Need A Miracle* (Blue Sky Turn Black, 214 Thornhill, D.D.O. Quebec Canada, H9G 1P7) When Dave Macleod cries, "We're lacking symmetry" on "Malt Liquor," he perfectly sums up the nature of Spengler. Spengler is an act that playfully alternates between spoken and screamed vocals, which accompany highly kinetic playing that borders at times on the verge of freeform lunacy. Unfortunately, these moments are too few and far between, for much of *We Need a Miracle* is in need of direction. While the bizarre and dark lyrics of "Shark Attack," the urgency of "No Time Wasted" and the intricacy of the instrumental "Hyjynx" were all highly unorthodox efforts, I still yearned for a more unified sense of style. While the storytelling nature of "Sexual Heathen", "The Choice is Made, the Traveler Has Come", "Loose Screws" and "Malt Liquor" allow these songs to have their moments, the band does not sustain a definitive groove, and I found myself growing frustrated with an act who based We Need a Miracle upon a unique interpretation of music, but too quickly allowed that vision to become formulaic. - Rich Quinlan

TOBIN SPROUT - "Lost Planets & Phantom Voices" (LUNA, 1521 W. 86 St., Indianapolis IN 46260) The former Guided By Voices #2 is back with another lo-fi collection where he plays most of the instruments. Great artwork, as expected, although I would feel cheated had I paid a full album price for only a half-hour of music. But he is Tobin Sprout... –Darren Paltrowitz

PICK HIT: SSRI

SSRI – "Go, Fight, Win!" EP (www.ssrimusic.com) You don't often find songs that force you to sing them out loud in your car or anywhere else for that matter. SSRI's mission is simple: Make songs that will invoke the feeling of summer all year round, and to energize a crowd at a show. Here's a band that's dedicated to creating original songs with infectious, melodic, and catchy guitar lines with witty, sarcastic (smart ass) lyrics. This is pop punk that will stick to your brain like gum on your shoe on a hot summer day! - Phil Rainone

STAGGER STAGGER CRAWL - *Déjà vu Ultraman* (Potatoeater Music Ltd., P.O. Box 3116, Annapolis, MD 21403-staggerstaggercrawl.com) There's some awfully talented musicianship here playing music that doesn't seem to take itself too seriously. Nice minor chord guitar work and good funk bass powered by influences seeming to range from contemporary rock to weird indie-stuff. Smart lyrics and excellent layering make this a good disc overall. Standouts include: "Hole in My Head" and "You Suck." Check 'em out... - Mike Chant

JOHANNA STAHLEY – "After Ours" 5-song EP (www.johannastahley.com) Anyone who ever saw Johanna Stahley front her old band Spredhaus knows she has a terrific voice and charisma out the ying-yang. Spredhaus broke up (as did Stahley and her fiancée, guitarist Joe Kaczorowski), but the two continue to write and perform together on this EP. Spredhaus specialized in frat-house funk and red-hot-mama rock, but thankfully Stahley has moved on to lush romantic ballads, or what radio people call AAA . It's not what I listen to, but there are millions of people out there glued to Lite FM stations all over the country who could quickly make Johanna the next Mariah Carey with just a few breaks. Tommy Mottola, call your service. – Jim Testa

STALAG 13 – *In Control (Reissue + 4 bonus tracks)* (Dr. Strange Records) This isn't The Big Takeover so don't expect an encyclopedic rundown of this reissue and why it's important in the annals of punk history. All I know about Stalag 13 is that they were part of the early Eighties hardcore scene from Oxnard, California that came to be known as Nardcore. Listening to this for the first time (and not as a reissue,) I hear a band obviously influenced by Minor Threat, DYS, and that early generation of hyperspeed hardcore bands. Even the simple "know yourself" lyrics – "You should take a look at your own self / before you start judging me," "You're afraid to live your life/ you're afraid to speak your mind/ and all you do is waste your time / with stupid repetitious lies" - sound like they were written by the young Ian MacKaye. Not being from Oxnard, this has little relevance to my life; all I hear is how obviously derivative it was, even for its own time. So if you think hardcore started and ended in 1981, be my guest. Otherwise, this one's for those old-timers wanting to replace their decaying vinyl with a CD relic from their youth. – Jim Testa

STAR SPANGLED BASTARDS – Whose War Is It? (Go Kart) Now that America finds itself at war again, there is a huge resurgence in political punk reminiscent of the Reagan era, and the Star Spangled Bastards are a good example. SSB play a brash style of street punk, sort of a modern American Discharge. Looking at punk from a historical perspective, it's interesting to note how different styles of bands come and go (emo, hardcore, pop-punk) but there have always been Brit-influenced streetpunk bands like these tenacious Bastards. It's a shame we had to go to war before anyone started paying attention again. – Johnny Puke

STARLESS - *To Sleep: Perchance To Dream* (Indigo Music Center, 3650 Osage St., Denver, CO 80211) I get nervous when a band hangs their collective hat on the lyrics of their disc, for that tells me that the music must be lacking. Starless is one of those acts whose songs would make a better book than disc. *To Sleep: Perchance to Dream* nearly left me doing both. Vocalist and lyricist Aric Jorgenson spins yarns of religious disenchantment as he contrasts the spiritual promises of religion with the real world situations its hopes to assuage. There are moments of beauty on To Sleep, such as he lush "They Will Not Sing to Me" or "Lullaby," but this is simply too bland too often. Divided into three segments entitled "Doubting," "Falling" and "Rising," To Sleep attempts to emulate an epic poem, treating each set of four songs as a stanza. While the band does not provide any answers as to their spiritual conundrums, the members of Starless, unfortunately, do not deliver any musical spark either. The lyrics are beautiful and written with incredible eloquence. However, Jorgenson possibly should investigate the notion of channeling his frustrations into prose without any musical accompaniment. I loved what was being said, but this was simply far too musically lifeless. - Rich Quinlan

STELLASTARR* - "Somewhere Across Forever" EP (Tiswas Records, www.tiswasnyc.com; www.stellastarr.com) I've a hard time not harping on the Wedding Present when I listen to this. I like the Wedding Present. Or liked. That guy, the singer, was always so heartbroken and bitter – man, oh man! But I haven't really heard them in years. I remember the more recent stuff being less satisfying than their earlier work. And I saw them live once in NYC, left halfway through the set because the vocalist's sideburns were bumming me out. Anyhow, this Stellastarr* CD is a 4-song sampler thing. It's a lot like The Wedding Present fronted by that annoyingly cloy guy from the B-52's or the guy from The Wedding Present fronting The Rentals, perhaps. Whatever the case, it's like early '90s college radio all over again. In college I knew a kid with stringy black hair named George. He loved The Wedding Present and the Swans. His connection to these things made sense. I mean the way he connected them seemed proper. The first night we hung out he was wearing a Joy Division shirt and showed me a selection of suicide videos in his dorm room. It was kind of like Faces of Death but his own collection. George was going bald and looked like Rob Lowe. He was handsome. That night, after I left his place, I played the Wedding Present on my radio show as a sure-fire pop moment nestled between the noise I loved. Lately I'm more into abstract hip hop, but this tiny offering by Stellastar* serves a similar purpose as something that fits well between other stuff. Nothing major, but I bet you ten bucks these folks get over-hyped by press time, because if you have no historical context then filler seems more important. - Brandon Stosuy

STICK FIGURE SUICIDE – *Mission* (Break Even Records, PO Box 42469, Philadelphia, PA 19101) This is straightforward political pop-punk. It has the heavy, serious vocals rapping social commentary over super quick guitars and drums that go dig-dat-diggy-dat dig-dat-diggy-dat. There are occasional jump-up-and-down parts with longer drawn out vocal harmonies and the even rarer Oi! part with the whole group singing back up "whoa-oh-ohs." Stick Figure Suicide isn't doing anything new, but they are perpetuating a genre of music that when pulled off well - as this is – speaks to a very specific group of people, and you know who you are. Also of note is the band's label, Break Even Records, which is an independent non-profit label dedicated to providing an outlet for artists to have their art heard and seen, rather than making money, which is something that you don't normally hear labels say. This is a fine record, friends. If you're down with the pop-punk, pick it up. If not, you used to be so pick it up for old time's sake. –Joel Roston

STILLWELL - *Don't Face a Problem...Burn It* (Forgeagain Records, PO Box 146837, Chicago, IL 60614, www.forgeagainrecords.com) Wow, this is intense music that hits you over the head, hard. It's heavy, it's very math, it's post-hardcore/post-emo. The recording quality could have been better, though. It's a little muddy, with far too much reverb, but the music, which shifts all over the place in many unexpected ways, shines through it all. Sometimes, it gets very unexpected, such as on the final track, "Okay, man. Sure. No Problem. Um, thanks," when the guitar lines get simple and the bass lines get intensely complex. A few of the tracks tend to fall a bit flat, sounding too much like some of the others, but for the most part, this is a challenging debut full-length from a promising young band. - Paul Silver

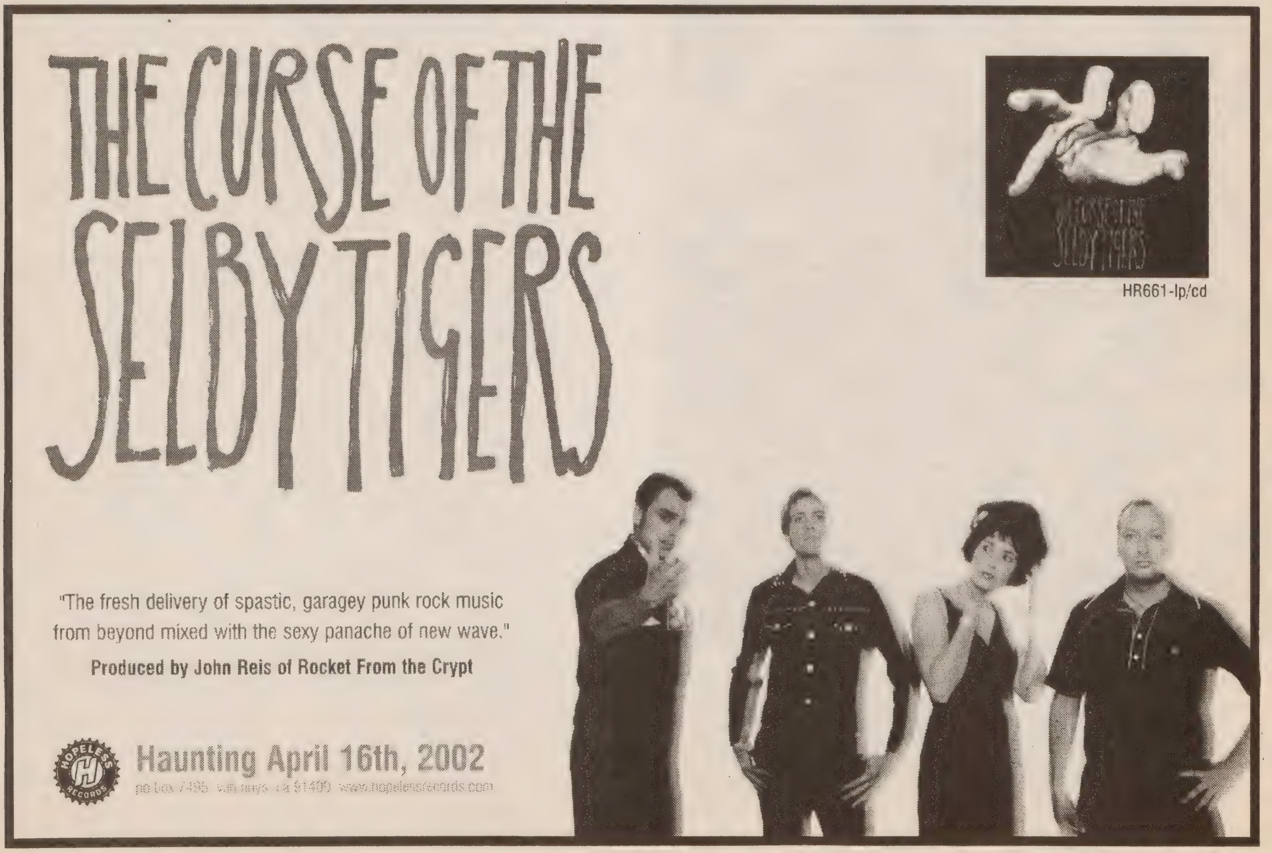
THE STRANGLERS - *The Very Best Of* (EMI) During the late 70's and 80's the Stranglers (cool name), helped define the punk scene. Unlike the Ramones and Sex Pistols, they look a more pop music route, with some dark overtones to their lyrics ("No More Heroes," Strange Little Girl," Who Wants the World," etc.). With subliminal melodies and a brooding vocal style ("Skin Deep," "Hanging Around," for starters), The Stranglers along with bands like The Smiths and a whole slew of groups that relied more on melody than malice, helped expand Punk's influence. Their cool covers of the Kinks "All Day and All of the Night," and Question Mark and the Mysterians "96 Tears," pay tribute to two of the originators of garage/ punk rock. Overall, a good collection of songs ("Always the Sun" is a great, melodic pop tune!) that shows another side of the 70's/80's punk music scene. - Phil Rainone

THE STRATFORD 4 -- *Love & Distortion* (Jetset, 67 Vestry Street, New York NY, 10013) It's not surprising that The Stratford 4, a band whose lead-singer and guitarist Chris Streng used to jam with future members of Black Rebel Motorcycle Club before they formed their present line-up, would be inspired by a comparable set of stoney-eyed Brits from across the pond. If there's anyone that's proved Anglophilia can be a good thing it's BRMC. The recent success of their self-titled debut married the best British rock in the last decade with a distinctly American attitude. On their second LP, *Love and Distortion*, The Stratford 4 turn a similar trick. My Bloody Valentine, the Jesus and Mary Chain, Ride, and to a lesser extent, Spiritualized, can all be found in Streng's mopey drawl and lead-guitarist Jake Hosek's church-bell fuzz. Though their debut, 2002's *The Revolt Against Tired Noises*, made use of both indie-pop attitude and Brit-rock melodic sensibility, *Love and Distortion* places itself firmly in the realm of the later. The opening track is pure-grade Shoegaze. With Streng waxing existential and Hosek's reverb-heavy six-string flying high, "where the ocean meets the eye" is the best song Ride never wrote. The wistful romanticism of "twelve months" and "tonight would be alright" are similarly satisfying, if a bit pre-mature. And Streng's honesty on 'the simple things are taking over" and "telephone" is refreshing amidst his band's turgid Brit-rock posing. The latter tune's description of a phone conversation between Streng and his mother is especially endearing as she reminds her pop star son not to forget about Dylan and the Stones, noting that "when I was 22, I was a lot like you." Only rarely, though, does Streng pull forth enough charisma to make his mates' unremitting psychedelia worthwhile. All too often *Love and Distortion* just sounds like a band throwing effect after effect onto songs that would fail to stand alone without the reverb turned up to 11. Many artists, including a few you'd find in this crew's record collection, made brilliant records running everything but the kitchen sink through their amps, but The Stratford 4's relentlessly layered sound fails to give their meek tunes much room to breath.If these four co-eds can add some dynamics and song-writing ability to their well-honed space-rock sound, then we might get a record that actually goes some where worth seeing when the band's epic fuzz soars above the cloud-line. But for now, we should at last be grateful that The Statford 4 are bringing back a Brit-rock sound young America has precious little experience with. - John MacDonald

STRIKING DISTANCE - *The Bleeding Starts Here* (Reflections Records, Spoorwegstraat 117, 6828 AP Arnhem, The Netherlands) This is a feast for all Striking Distance fans who covet the band's extremely rare debut 7". In addition to these nine tracks recorded in 1999, you also treated to six demo versions of songs that ended up on the band's brilliant *March To Your Grave* record. The disc captures a brutally fast, relentlessly aggressive playing that is written solely for the hardcore purist. If you did not know that the majority of the music here is under three years old, you could imagine yourself at a matinee show fifteen years ago. To that end, you may just fall off your chair while listening to the band's versions of Void's "My Ruler" and Minor Threat's classic "Screaming at a Wall". Every track is a gem and this needs to be found as quickly as possible, for Striking Distance bring back the legendary DC sound for contemporary fans. This should help educate the kids about what real hardcore is and allow old guys like myself to revel in the fact that there are bands out there that still get it! - Rich Quinlan

THE STUNTCOCKS (www.stuntcocks.com) A welcome return from the abyss from these New Brunswick perennials, who have obviously gotten a second wind. At their best, the 'Cocks crank out hyperactive Buzzcocks-ish punk with funny lyrics, which makes the first half of this CD tons of fun. Goofy, ultra-catchy tracks like "Butthead Surfer," "Pre-Traumatic Stress Disorder," and "Noisy Fuck" represent the Stuntcocks at their best. The only problem is that when these guys take their tongues out of their cheeks, the party's over; I could really do without the jazzy, lounge-y forays into Steely Dan territory, which drag down the middle of the disc. But *The Stuntcocks* ends on a high note with a couple more cool tracks, including "Girl I Always Wanted To Be (With)". Anyone who thinks punk rock is just for kids needs to get their head out of their ass and listen to what a bunch of seasoned pros can do with three chords and a killer riff. Stuntcocks forever. -- Jim Testa

SUPAFUZZ - *Down for the Underground* (Mine's Bigger than Yours Music; www.supafuzz.com) I've seen this band twice live and this quartet put on a kick ass show. After both concerts, my voice was hoarse from screaming the lyrics along with vocalist/guitarist Dave Angstrom and my arms were exhausted from air drumming with the intricate grooves of drummer Chris Leathers. In between my throat and arms being whipped into submission, my head was throbbing from the low frequency thrashings from bassist Jason Groves. Eric Belt's talent on the guitar, both during his lead during the mellow "Tonic and Cigarettes" and during the groove of "Mr. Policeman", married to his contagious smile, have made both shows ones I am unlikely to forget. This CD, recorded live at A1A in the band's former home base of Lexington, KY, on May 25, 2002, showcases a band with an idea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of what it takes to be a successful live band. While these are songs that can be found on the band's previous two releases (a self-titled debut and the follow-up All About the Rock), it would be safe to say the songs on this live CD have the kickof energy you'd expect at a live show. Leading off with five of the strongest tracks on All About the Rock, Supafuzz doesn't lose focus. When they launch into the crowd favorite "Mr. Policeman", it is obvious the band has the audience where they want them. The CD ends with the band's single, "I am the King", that made a splash on radio stations like Rock 108 and KRNA when Rock was released in 2000. The band routinely makes the trek from the South up to Iowa. It's a tradition to check out a Supafuzz show. To be honest, though, I have three, perhaps superficial, complaints about this CD. First, the band's live shows end with covers. At the first show I was at, they launched into "War Pigs" and at later shows, they covered AC/DC's "Whole Lotta Rosie" to end their shows. I wish the band would have put a cover, perhaps as a hidden track, to give you, perhaps someone that has not seen the band live, a taste of this band at their best. It is a tradition that, when describing Supafuzz live, has to be mentioned to beaccurate. Second, Angstrom's stage presence at a show is admirable. He talks to the crowd about having a good time and about the people he's encountered. That element, that connection, he can establish with the crowd doesn't come across as there is little to no 'between song' dialogue. Third, I've heard this band during their sound check, playing songs that haven't been released. They have some outstanding new songs that they didn't include here. I wish they would have included at least one new song. Rock was released in 2000 so that is 3 years without new Supafuzz. What the band has released is tremendous and I wholly recommend seeking it out and seeking out this quartet when they play your town. It is a representation of their live shows. It's just that since I've seen the band live, I'm aware of three elements that are not included. Maybe . . .. the band is planning an exclusive "fan's version" of this release that I haven't heard about <hint, hint>. - Paul Hanson

SYLVIE -- *I Wish I Was Driving* (Does Everyone Stare? PO Box 1006, Edison, NJ, 08818) Remember when the word "emo" meant something more than a reason to squirm in your boots? Regina, Saskatchewan's Sylvie sound totally oblivious to the current MTV-style "emo" hype, instead drawing influence from the DC scene that spawned integral emotional hardcore bands like Jawbox and Fugazi. *I Wish I Was Driving* features nine excellent songs that set a pleasant, uplifting mood that is great for when the chips are down. Raspy, heartfelt vocals push this into the upper echelon of the genre. Sure, the album tends to drag through some moody ballads and instrumental interludes, but in a world where most bands are pushing pop as emo, it's refreshing to hear a band who aren't afraid to let their songs develop and pulsate. - Jason Schreurs

SUBINCISION – *Jingo* (Substandard Records) Subincision rejuvenates the old school style of punk (Bad Religion, Rancid, etc.) and adds touches of 80 ‘fs new wave. It doesn ‘ft sound like it would work in paper, but in reality, they ‘fve come up with a strong, interesting album! Most of the songs are catchy, sing-a-long tunes with satirical lyrics. Lead singer Pat McMain ‘fs voice is anything but smooth. His rough vocal style gets the point across with attitude and sheer will power. ‘gJingo ‘h has a raw, live feel to it. A good indication of their live show! -Phil Rainone

SWORN IN - *Sworn In* (Bridge Nine Records, www.BRIDGE9.com) When I was a kid, most of the hardcore bands were singing about unity and kicking the shit out of non patriots. Today, the little hardcore I've come across seems to delve deeper into the inner psyche, as opposed to cursing Saddam Hussein for making this world a scary place to live in. Perhaps hardcore kids today are grappling more with torn hearts and bruised egos, or at least that's the overriding theme for Sworn In's self-titled release. I know it sounds a hell of a lot like emo, but there is nothing pretty or jangly about this straight edge outfit from England. Instead, vocalist Delaney Jae screams and screams like a madman who hasn't been fed his dinner. "Life's a burnt out candle for a birthday wish that never came/a script drenched in regret." These are some passionate lyrics, and so what if they're sophomoric, at least they come from the heart. If I was a 16-year-old getting dicked over by the Jenny and Jill's of this world, Sworn In would most certainly e playing in my mom's Durango on the way to pick up my friends for a night on the strip. – Dan Storchan

SYLVIE - *I Wish I Was Driving* (Does Everyone Stare? Records PO Box 35004 Edmonton, Alberta T5K 2R8 Canada) Apparently, people still relish the "emo" label up in Canada, for Sylvie describe their sound as "passionate emo" (as if there was any other kind?). However, while their press releases need to be reworked, their playing does not. Rising and fading with lush elegance, I Wish I Was Driving is a truly beautifully sounding record with just the right amount of guitar squall to prevent this from becoming too dreamy. With warm vocals shared among guitarists Joel Passmore and Chris Notenboon along with bassist Riva Farrell, tracks like "Smoke and Mirrors" and "Park Bench" sound both expansive and intimate, while the instrumental title track is finely delivered. However, for my money, the best was saved for last as the aforementioned instrumental wafted effortlessly into "Grid" and the nine minute epic closer "The Reason Why", which could be the reason why you buy this. Yes, if you are cynical, you have heard this before, but when done correctly, such as performed by Sylvie, this is music that cannot be ignored. - Rich Quinlan

THE TEEN SENSATION GLASSES (Whoa Oh Records, 52 Mcloughlin St, Glen Cove, NY 11542) Pop-punk very derivative of The Lillingtons. I should eat this up but this disc leaves a lot to be desired. The hooks aren ‘ft that catchy, the music ‘fs not that interesting and the lyrics are pretty run of the mill. There are a few inspired moments such as the song ‘gCheat ‘h with the line ‘gyou make want to cheat on my girlfriend ‘h and the song with the line ‘gshe ‘fs so cute I don ‘ft care if she pukes ‘h but two great lines do not a great album make. It says so in the bible. – Oliver Lyons

THERE WERE WIRES (Iodine Recordings, 1085 Commonwealth Ave., PMB 318, Boston, MA, 02215) For once in my lengthy term at Schreurs Review Central, a band manages to include a bonus live set on their CD without pissing me off with horrible sound and repeated songs ad nauseam. Boston's There Were Wires end their self-titled, nine-song disc with a live set from local college radio station WERS. It's an impassioned, powerful set from a band who must have been bouncing off the studio walls. The album songs are even better, combining the metallic chaos of Deadguy and Botch with the epic emotion of Yage or You and I. "Bigger and Better Things" even provides an acoustic send-off that shows the melody these songs have hidden deep beneath the hellish sounds. Okay, the lyrics are only one step above notebook-scrawled, bus trip meanderings, but, hey, sometimes simplicity can be refreshing, and it certainly is here. When singer Jaime Mason sends a blood curdle of, "We're all so fake," he sounds anything but. Besides, the focus here is not on the literary relevance of the lyrics, but on the screaming and the noise, both of which are pure music to the ears. - Jason Schreurs

THEY FOUGHT BACK – *Resist* (87 Records, 214 Ogden Ave., Jersey City, NJ, 07307) You have to hand it to They Fought Back; they really are one of a kind. Mixing tribal drumming, funk-slap bass lines, banshee vocals and a stomping guitar groove, this New Jersey band creates a sound all their own. Vocalist Tree (yes, Tree) sounds like she is simultaneously channeling the spirits of Janis Joplin and Wendy O. Williams, while the band lurches and romps behind her. At times, this has a definite Rage Against the Machine vibe, during others the Fugazi lilt is striking. Sure, it's not up to the unachievable level of either of those bands, but it's pretty darn close. *Resist* is an amazing debut from a Jersey band bound to gain much attention in other parts of the world. – Jason Schreurs

TOO BAD EUGENE – *Moonlighting* (Tooth & Nail Records, PO Box 12698, Seattle, WA, 98111) Here I am grooving out a bit to the uplifting melancholy of Too Bad Eugene, you know, enjoying the sounds and thinking, "Hey, this ain't too bad in a teen movie soundtrack kinda way." Then I realize this comes from God Central over at Tooth and Nail and I start to pick the words "Jesus" and "God" out here and there in the slightly (uh-oh) angelic vocal delivery. Yep, they're a Christian band and, if that and super melodic emo rock are you're thing, this might just be your one-way ticket to the big house… or whatever. Many blessings go out to their drum tech. – Jason Schreurs

TOXIC NARCOTIC- *We're All Doomed* (Go Kart Records, P.O. Box 20, Prince street station, NYC 10012). Holy shit! This is what I'm talking about! One of rawest, most pissed off, insane and heavy punk albums I've heard in awhile. Songs titles like "Asshole," "Shut The Fuck Up", and "Bullshit Conditions" let you know they're taking no prisoners, and aren't in the mood for any feedback. With over the top lyrics, and the music to match, the fury heard on this recording is unreal. -Phil Pinto

HE TRAMPS () This three-piece garage punk powerhouse features male/female vocals. Both Ayn and Glen have a yowling, frenetic vocal style that will send shivers up and down your spine! With Telemundo slammin ‘f the skins, The Tramps create a fresh rockabilly vibe that is missing in rock and roll. From beginning to end these 14 tunes are full of punk-spewed perfection! -Phil Rainone

TRANSPLANTS (Hellcat Records) First of all, I want to say that this album is nothing like I've heard in a long time. The Transplants (Tim Armstrong/Rancid, Travis Baker/ Blink 182, and newcomer Rob Aston), sound highly original with a mix of stylistic influences that don't stray very far from the bands home base of punk rock. The Transplants incorporate blazing hard-core guitars, dancehall beats, hip-hop, reggae, and most of all, rock & roll! The best example I can give is, when the Clash took a chance and successfully mixed, punk, roots, and reggae, and made an incredible influence on the Punk scene in the 70's. Yeah, I think the Transplants are that influential! - Phil Rainone

TRAVOLTAS - *Endless Summer* (Fast Music, POB 206512, New Haven, CT 06512) I don't think it was a coincidence that the Travoltas titled their new CD after that of the Beach Boys (from the 60's). Cool vocal harmonies with catchy- as- hell melodies combine to give the music a unique, modern sound. The Travoltas are another one of those Swedish bands (Vines, Hellicopters, etc.). that, like in the 60's with the Beatles, Dave Clark 5, etc., took American pop/rock, and reinvented it, giving us a very much needed shot in the arm. The Travoltas will wake you up much in the same way. Besides the Beach Boys they also tip their hat to the Ramones and pop/ punk in general. Their music reminds us of simple pleasures- mainly girls, sun, and fun. "One for the Road," "Endless Summer," "Norwegian Girl," etc., all have that sweet powerpop sound that most bands would die for. The latter song pays homage to the Beach Boy's "California Girls" with smooth vocal harmonies, and 60's inspired surf melodies. Every time I listen to this disc, it neer fails to cheer me up! - Phil Rainone

TROUBLED HUBBLE - *Penturbia* (Latest Flame Records, 1638a North Astor Street, Milwaukee, WI 53202; www.troubledhubble.com) After listen number one, I prematurely dismissed Elburn, Illinois' Troubled Hubble as Dismemberment Plan Jr., a Modest Mouse cover band, or Built to Spill-lite. That easy-enough assessment hinges on Chris Otepka's chirpy voice and familiar vocal lines as well as some secondary stuff like dramatic guitar parts, the tight rhythm section, and the sometimes embarrassing lyrical flourishes (the link to Dismemberment Plan is most strong here & I've always kind of liked DP but when I listen closely to what's being sung, I blush and think of Star Trek conventions and/or progressive rock). But because I'm so tired of post-punk-loving white guys with afros, I was struck by Trouble Hubble's unpretentious joy (almost like Poi Dog Pondering - oddly & especially on "Work") and their lust for rural areas, canoes, cornfields, dusty back roads. So I hung on. I hung on and looked for more specific details, memorized the maps of their town, opened my mind a bit. All that new age bullshit paid off because I came to realize that Troubled Hubble honestly are forging a unique sound despite similarities to the above mentioned super groups. The band members are young. They look 16. They're in their early 20s, maybe. And while we aren't hearing the expansiveness of *Perfect From Now On*, the opening movement of "Airplanes" is flat-out glorious as is the last section of "What We Do." And as if daring me to fall into the trap of facile judgment making, "Migraine" starts off sounding just like Modest Mouse but twists elsewhere, shaking off easy reference points like so much lint. So does any of this matter? Sure. Does it have use value? Sure it does. Dismemberment Plan just announced a break-up, the last Modest Mouse was a bit sketchy (I think Isaac Broch's backwoods-pretty Ugly Cassanova is much more useful and artful at this point), and Doug Martsch's been feeling a little bit country. Regardless, amid such a sorry rock revival, maybe we ARE in need of smart, tight, sincere pop. - Brandon Stosuy

TURBO NEGRO – *Ass Cobra* and *Apocalypse Dudes* (reissues) (Burning Heart/Epitaph) I shouldn't have to explain wh0 Turbo Negro is, as they've been the tongue-in-cheek favorite gay Norweign metal-punk band of every hip music fan for years now. This Spring finds the denim-clad marauders on a bigtime tour opening for Queens Of The Stone Age, and both of these classic LP's reissued in the digi-pak format with extras. *Ass Cobra* is the more raw and punk of the two, and its reissue CD features videos of "Denim Demon" and "Midnight NAMBLA." *Apocalypse Dudes* is the more fully-realized effort, where the band's Ramones influence comes out strong amidst their playful musicianship that incorporates 70's metal clichés with their campy humor. *Apocalypse Dude's* extras include MPEG videos of the songs "Get It On," "Are You Ready (For Some Darkness?)", and a live video of "The Age of Pamparius." Long live gay Norweign metal! – Johnny Puke

TWELVE HOUR TURN - *Perfect Progress, Perfect Destruction* (No Idea Records) This is these guys second record and while I'm not familiar with the first I am impressed by what I hear on this one. Emotionally driven, post-punk art-core, or something like it. Melodically driven, yet rythmically solid bass. Slash and burn, sometimes sweet, sometimes bitter guitars. Challenging drumwork. Singy/screamy vocals with intelligent and provoking lyrics. Yeah, it's been done before but these guys do it well and I'm a sucker for this kind of post-hardcore experimentalism. They toe the line between dissonance and consonance throughout but keep your attention with well crafted songs and the knack to throw in a hook when appropiate. Lyrically they flirt with apathy, loss of youth, the droll nine to five lifestyle, our modern caste system, casting aside preconcived notions, and more with deep reflection and wit. All in all, this rocks. Favs include "Sleep Comes Early for You", "Dance Like Everyone is Watching", "The Dream of Youth", and "Manifest Destiny". Recommended! - Eric alls

TWOTHIRTYEIGHT - *You Should Be Living* (Tooth and Nail Records, Po Box 12698, Seattle, WA 98111) While much of Twothirtyeight's playing was a little gentle for my taste, one cannot help but be entranced by the lyrics of this band. "The Sticks are Woven in the Spokes" sets the tone as Chris Staples utters, "I can't fix what I don't know is broke/Just laugh and tell another joke"; words both heartfelt and impassioned. On "Sad Semester," Staples laments how "all the teachers and coaches were intolerant of individuals who were made up their own minds," yet my favorite came with "The Bathroom is a Creepy Place for Pictures of Your Friends." Firstly, it's a brilliant title and the rest of the lyrics only make it better. However, the majority of the music is quiet and overly reserved. There are flashes of more focus musicianship, but the focal points are the topics which the band raise lyrically. They discuss affairs and events which most take for granted, but when you hear them on You Should Be Living, you cannot help but feel connected. The sons ebb and flow in the emotional grip of the listener, ultimately not being concerned with a happy or neat ending. A solid record for those who love great storytelling. - Rich Quinlan

UNIT PRIDE -- *Then And Now* (Mankind Records, PO Box 265, Bellflower CA 90707) Unit Pride were Arizona kids in the mid- to late-Eighties caught up in the same SxE mosharama as NYC bands like Youth of Today (they even covered NYC's Straight Ahead's theme song on their demo.) Singer Eric Ozenne went on to the Nerve Agents and (with Token Entry's Timmy Chunks) Redemption 87. This reissue includes long out-of-print tracks from the band's sole 7-inch EP and demo, along with original artwork by Op Ivy's Jesse Michaels. For anyone strongly into the era's bands and sound, this might be of some interest, but listening to this CD's simplistic straight-edge lyrics and simple-minded breakbeat arrangements made me wonder why I spent so many Sundays at CBGB back in the Eighties. – Jim Testa

USELESS ID – *No Vacation From the World* (Kung-Fu Records) Hey! Even in war torn Israel kids still find time to form bands, learn to play instruments and rip off The Ataris and Face to Face! It's things like that that help me sleep better at night. Seriously, I could be mean but I really do have a soft spot in my heart for this type of music and Useless ID are pretty good at the melodic punk game. If you like The Ataris you should check out their foreign exchange student counterparts. – Oliver Lyons

THE VACANCIES - *Gutpunch* (Smog Veil Records, 316 California Ave. # 207, Reno NV 89509) Hip looking older men with tattoos playing punky, glam rock. I'm really not too keen on this type of sound. Since when did Guns N' Roses go from being that crappy band that your older brother liked to the new gods of the punk scene? And didn't this glam punk sound die when D Generation broke up? What's up with that? If you have flame and dice tattoos you'll eat this up. - Oliver Lyons

THE VANDALS - *Internet Dating Superstuds* (Kung Fu Records) I first heard The Vandals at the 2001 Warped Tour. (They rocked the main stage)! I didn't realize at the time that they've been around since '89 (hey, I'm not as punk as you, ok)? From what I've heard and read since then, The Vandals are the real deal. Their past and present records weren't written to fit into mainstream radio or MTV. (Although, a sharp radio program director would make a major coup, getting these guys in his rotation). Songs like "43210-1" or "Disproportioned Head" have the firepower and warped sense of humor of an early Ramones record. "Soccer Mom" is one of the most playful punk tunes I've heard in a while. It's got a monster hook with a story about a guy who's dating a divorced soccer Mom with a couple of bratty kids. Definitely not your typical Ozzie & Harriet love story. The deeper into the album you go, the hooks get catchier, and the sing along lyrics just pop out of the songs. "The Unseen Tears of the Albacore" has the intensity and intelligence of a Ranid or Bad Religion song. This disc is just a blast to listen to! - Phil Rainone

If Primus ever became a punk band, they would sound like the Vandals. Imagine Les Claypool's quirky sense of humor and rev it up to mach 10 and you have the Vandals. These guys are ruthless and unforgiving. In "Where's Your Dignity," vocalist Dave Quackenbush sings "Don't think about her/ don't speak about her, again and again I tell you this as a friend/ she's gone and now you're carrying on with flowers and bad poetry/ you're sorry but now so are we." Complimenting the truthful lyrics is music that sounds like a 1950s ballad. The other noteworthy feature of this CD is

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the performance by drummer Josh Freese. I remember seeing a picture of him in Modern Drummer when he was 8 or 9 - - a bona fide child prodigy. A recent issue of MD caught up with him, leading off with the comment about <paraphrased> "how great it is when a child prodigy lives up to their expectations." It certainly is. Josh Freese is an animal on the drums, a bona fide punk drummer that others should listen to for inspiration. - Paul Hason

THE VANDALS LIVE - *Sweatin' to the Oldies* (Kung Fu Records DVD) The Vandals are one of Southern California's most enduring punk legacies (don't forget Social Distortion). This two disc set includes the bands original 1993 documentary which will give newcomers to the bands music a good perspective of the early days when fans sported the grunge fashion. The second disc features the band members such as singer Dave Quackenbush as the temporary singer for Pennywise, performing in Italy. They also have recent live performances, and much, much more. This is an uplifting reminder of how far the punk scene has come throughout the last 20 years! - Phil Rainone

VENUSIAN SKYLINE - *Twilight Songs* (Undecided Records, 10695 Lake Oak Way, Boca Raton, FL 33498) Remember every time Billy Corgan of Smashing Pumpkins went too nasal and went out of his way to sing badly? Apply that to this guy. The music theory is, "If I play something boring a lot of times before doing something different, it will build suspense for an even less spectacular change..." You guys can play, I'll give you that, but cripes, I kept waiting, wayyyyyting...... Lame. - Mike Chant

WAFFLEHOUSE' - *Olympia* (Forgeagain Records, PO Box 146837, Chicago, IL 60614, www.forgeagainrecords.com) Post emo might be the most apt description for this album, but that would only tell part of the story. Adding bits of funk and a string ensemble in strategic spots adds to the already complex textures. "Cinder Block Mountain" is a two parter, with part 2 having an unforgettable ending, with the keyboards slowly going mad. Excellent stuff, recommended! - Paul Silver

WAKING HOURS -- *The Good Way* (No Deal Records) This former East Coast band, now relocated to L.A., is still churning out bubblicious power-pop garage-rock. All you need to know is that the band handed me this disc at SXSW; I brought it back to my hotel room, played it once, and my roommate and I were humming the opening track, "Sunshine," for the rest of the morning. If you like your rock 'n' roll catchy and sweet, layered with Beatlesque harmonies and instantly memorable melodies... if International Pop Overthrow is your favorite national holiday... if you'd rather hear the Monkees than Led Zeppelin on the radio... then you need a little Waking Hours in your life. – Jim Testa

WATSONVILLE PATIO - *Faster, Please!* (www.watsonvillepatio.com) What's not to like about Watsonville Patio? The Portland alt-rock band plays slick, overproduced college rock similar to Veruca Salt. It's not offensive or awful sounding in any way; it's just sort of there, droning away in the background. Vocalist Janice Grube sometimes slips into a cigarette-induced growl a la Patti Smith, so that's a definite downer, but the songs manage to stay peppy and safe. This band will either get their 15 minutes of fame or fade into obscurity; either way, the name Watsonville Patio isn't going to be on the tip of anyone's tongue for very long. - Jason Schreurs

THE WELCOME HOME - *9 songs for Madame LeClair* (Self-Released) The best explanation of "Math-Rock" I've ever heard goes something like this: "If 'Prog-Rock' is elaborately orchestrated, complex music that makes use of odd time signatures, performed by people who grew up listening to the Beatles, than 'Math-Rock' is sparsely orchestrated, complex music that makes use of odd time signatures, performed by people who grew up listening to Punk and Hardcore." This description applies to The Welcome Home. Hardcore and Punk riffs poke out throughout the entirety of this recording and, apart from a few textural tracks here and there, their instrumentation remains sparse. But if "Math-Rock" tends to be overly academic, intellectual, and forced at times, The Welcome home have found a way to make it feel natural. As you may have guessed, The Welcome Home are an instrumental band (as many "Math-Rock" bands tend to be), and their focus seems to be more on rhythm, tone, and mood than melody. To offset these typically "Math-Rock" elements, they make interestinguse of non-standard instrumentation, in particular keyboards, acoustic guitar, low-volume feedback swells, and drums played with brushes. This adds a very organic texture to many of the tracks and makes the music seem less cold and academic. Their choice of time signatures, and more importantly, time signature changes, flows very well and seems very natural. In addition to this, a decidedly low-fi production adds a very interesting texture. If you are looking for traditional songs with conventional song structure, melody, lyrics, this is not an album for you. Likewise, if your looking for dyed-in-the-wool "Math-Rock" that will have you scratching your head at every twist and turn, this is also not an album for you. However, if you are one of those few who are looking for subtle and interesting music that takes multiple listens and a fair amount of attention to fully appreciate, *9 Songs For Madame LeClair* is for you. - Daniel Madri

WHISKEY REBELS (GMMRecords.com) A young Sacramento band who sound far rougher & harder than their ages. No sappy pop punk in this release – just hard, sometimes alcohol fueled, lyrics about the bullshit of daily life. "Big Chuck" belts 'em out with gusto and a 40 oz. Swagger. I loved some of this stuff even the youthful naivette of blaming society for your ills and lack of progress -- uh, sorry, no. They don't tour much out of their CA area, except for the Beer Olympics in Atlanta, but they'd be worth catching. - Tom Brebric

WHITE LIGHT MOTORCADE - "Thank You, Goodnight!" (Octone, 560 Broadway, Suite 500, New York NY 10012) Bad, bad idea. New York City band with garage-rock image and a sound that often resembles post-"Flavor Of The Weak" American Hi-Fi. Brad Jones, I beg you to start producing relevant bands again. –Darren Paltrowitz

THE WICK EFFECT – *Quit* (Captive Ring Records – 172 East 4th St. 6-F, New York, NY, 10009, www.captivering.com) Psycho-delic noise rock trio by way of New York crank out the dual guitar/drums garage chaos. Better than anything being heralded as garage rock on the boob tube. This is raw and grating, requiring little to no talent, but a fuckload of attitude and general disregard. It's virtually impossible to listen to *Quit* in its entirety (nobody needs over 62 minutes of this), but so are 99 percent of albums over an hour long. – Jason Schreurs

WOOLWORTHY – *Recycler* (Does Everyone Stare? PO Box 1006, Edison, NJ, 08818) Woolworthy is a pretty solid late Replacements/early Soul Asylum post-punk band with a professional, polished sound. But, come on! Does anyone really need 78 minutes of this on one CD? I mean, how many Woolworthy completists can there be? I'm guessing not enough to hit the break-even point of pressing this slick looking disc. Someone's got money to burn; the recording is hot, the band looks well dressed and even the paper in the CD booklet is on full-color, thick stock. It's all well and dandy, but I was bored almost to tears before getting through a six-pack of the 23 songs. Fans of melodic punk with clean vocals might be interested in this; hey, they can buy it for the six songs that held my attention and consider the other 17 tracks a value-added bonus! Or avoid altogether and go buy *Let It Be* on yet another format. - Jason Schreurs

WORTHLESS UNITED – •gI Am Nothing •h EP (Now Or Never Records) Worthless United has three things going for them (the third is the most important). First, they're from Asbury Park, NJ, where a cool music scene is starting to blossom again. Second, they are on the Bouncing Souls •f label, which means if the Souls like them, there's a good chance you will too. Third, they play honest, passionate punk rock with a wide range of influences (Clash, Operation Ivy, Stones). This 4 songs E.P. leans more to politics lyrically, but they don't shove the message down your throat. Worthless United pack an albums worth of music into 4 songs. Lyrically, they •fll get you thinking, and you can't help but sing along! -Phil Rainone

YEAH YEAH YEAH'S - *Fever To Hell* (Interscope) The Yeah Yeah Yeah's, barely a year old as a band, came out of nowhere last year and dazzled the mainstream rock press, who were desperately looking for a "Next Big Thing" to follow the Strokes out of NYC. So here's the major label debut. There's no denying that singer Karen O. has a certain sexy charisma and the band itself an undeniable if somewhat lumpish energy. But given current economics, does that make them a major label band? The band is often called the Blondie of the New New Wave, but despite a shared trash aesthetic, that's not even close to being true: Deborah Harry has always been (and remains) a much more nuanced singer than Karen O., and Blondie the band became famous by incorporating everything from Sixties girl-group pop to reggae and rap into punk. For the first 8 of the 11 songs on this CD, the Yeah Yeah Yeah's pound away at their updated psychobilly sound, essentially a one-trick pony whose one trick isn't all that interesting. Karen O's stage presence doesn't translate to disc, and the band – especially the rhythm section – just doesn't cook. The last three tracks here veer from the YYY formula a bit, allowing Karen to open up and actually sing, with real melodies and different beats; but it's too little, too late. I could well be wrong – I have been before – but I don't see mainstream America embracing this kitschy one-note novelty; it's about as unlikely as the idea of American teens abandoning emo and hip-hop and suddenly wearing wraparound shades and listening to Mooney Suzuki. By our fall issue, we'll have major label releases from Longwave, the Witnesses, the Star Spangles, and several other NYC bands to judge, and we'll know if this NYC thing is a fad or a fizzle. - Jim Testa

THE YOUNG AND THE USELESS - Self-titled (Thorp Records; PO BOX 6786, Toledo, OH 43612; www.thorprecords.com) Hardcore vocalists are fairly genre specific. I mean they fit a very detailed adjective-based template. There are also, of course, the brilliant hardcore few who transcend Cookie-Monster stereotypes, create godhead, and lap the half-assed journeymen with their unique and ineffable charisma. Damn right. But my mind fails me. Okay, I weep for the old days of hardcore. Whatever the case, genre entrapment is very evident on The Young and the Useless' hapless (but compelling) cover of Journey's "Anyway You Want It," in which the band plays basically the same song Steve Perry's band did while the tonsil-aching vocalist hacks through the libretto all gruff and sinister and off-key. And "On The Way To Tetnus" also stands out as somehow anomalous. Imagine Robert Smith singing hardcore. Fun. The rest is a blur. - Brandon Stosuy

YOUR ENEMIES FRIENDS – "The Wiretap" EP(Buddyhead, Po Box 1268, Hollywood, CA 90078, www.yourenemiesfriends.com) Five attractive spy-clad (pseudo situationist? faux cold-war?) rockers with decent reading lists who relocated recently to Seattle from Los Angeles, Your Enemies Friends channel the earliest and most angular of Unwound, that all-around sprawling mess of *Fake Train* and *New Plastic Ideas*, punctuated by the keyboard drone and hiss of Milemarker, especially of the "we discovered Pro Tools" *Satanic Versus* e.p. What makes Unwound and Milemarker most interesting is that both bands allow for a certain endlessness to their outbursts...they don't mind droning or wallowing in a fuzz of repetition. The songs on "The Wiretap EP," while mildly compelling, are too briefly stated. Your Enemies Friends compose the sort of music you want to get lost in, but as of now everything resolves too easily. My request: expand your epic wings in a more frenetic fuzz and bluster on a future LP (maybe listen to some La Monte Young in preparation) because that'd be some glorious stuff. -Brandon Stosuy

HOWARD ZINN - *Artists in a Time of War* (Alternative Tentacles Records/AK Press) Historian and activist Howard Zinn gives a wide-ranging lecture in the immediate aftermath of (yep, you guessed it) 9/11. With this country in perpetual war mode, listening to Zinn's musings on the role of art and artists becomes vital. The talk (which also includes some handy history about U.S. imperialism, for anyone who thinks that 9/11 occured in a vacuum) becomes something of a theory and practice of artists working against war. The theory touches on Zinn's own experiences as a bombadier in World War II ("I always thought there was such a thing as a just war - until I was in one," he notes), and the practice touches on such towering figures as Mark Twain, Langston Hughes, and Eugene O'Neill. While occasionally lacking in focus, this disc manages to be a coherent plea and challenge to artists and citizens to think for themselves and not let the "experts" speak for them in matters of life and death. - Shawn Setaro

COMPILATIONS

A FISTFUL OF ROCK N ROLL Vol. 10 (Devil Doll Records – PO Box 30727, Long Beach, CA, 90853) I'm not sure if all the volumes in this series are this trashy, but Vol. 10 definitely focuses on the garage-y, trailer park side of punk. Finer moments come from the ripping Speedealer (they recently broke up, but are rumored to be playing again), the Link Wray-alike Muddy Frankenstein and VA's noisy The Strap-Ons. Plus, there are 22 other less memorable bands to trudge through. Greasers and pot-bellied perverts will be stoked; everyone else might find the whole package a little overwhelming. Includes an impressive essay on the early '80s hardcore scene in a tiny font that is unreadable without a really good magnifying glass. – Jason Schreurs

ANTIFOLK Vol. 1 (Rough Trade/Sanctuary) This compilation of 19 singer-songwriters (and one stand-up comedian) represents the cream of New York City's Antifolk scene, but dang if I can tell you what separates an Antifolk'er from any other folk singer. Some of these singers are political, others go for belly laughs, still others play traditionally romantic pop songs. Looks don't help either: Joie Dead Blond Girlfriend has blue and green-streaked hair down past his shoulders, while Lach - the guru of this scene and the man credited with coining the term Antifolk - looks like an insurance salesman. Acoustic guitars provide a running theme, but it's by no means unanimous. Lach himself steps up with a full-band power-pop arrangement of his catchy (and silly) "Drinking Beers With Mom," the band Dufus offers a psychotically catchy, Calypso-tinged novelty song entitled "Wee Ma Moo," and noisy folk/punkers Stipplicon sound like the Sex Pistols covering Dylan's "Subterranean Homesick Blues." In the more traditional vein of acoustic guitars and clever lyrics, standout tracks include Jeffrey Lewis' "You Don't Have To Be A Scientist To Do Experiments On Your Own Heart," Major Matt Mason's "Rock Star," Jim Flynn's Dylanesque "Smokescreen A Cappella Techno Blues," sweetly innocent acoustic ditties from Adam Green and Kimya Dawson (both of The Moldy Peaches), and Patsy Grace's lovely "Falling." Maybe the real definition of Antifolk is simply the willingness to follow your muse wherever it leads; imagine if the diehard folkies who booed Dylan at the Monterey Folk Festival back in the Sixties (simply for playing an electric guitar) could hear this crew! Folk music ain't what it used to be, and that is a good thing indeed. Dawson and Green -- who will both be releasing solo albums this Fall -- compiled this collection. - Jim Testa

ATTICUS: Dragging the Lake (Side One Dummy Records) One of the things I like about this comp. (besides the cool tunes), is just about all these bands played on either the Warped Tour or The Surf & Skate Fest. (Finch, Midtown, The Used, Boxcar Racer, etc.). I wish they'd release a live comp. from either the Tour or Fest already.! Mostly unrelased songs (one live unreleased cut from Jimmy Eat World), that represent some of the best of new school punk. Trying to narrow down my favorites would be tough. All the songs hold up as powerful, pop/punk tunes that would make anyone's hit list. "Ex-Miss" by New Found Glory stands out with a Christmas motif, pretty sleigh bells shaking alongside heavy guitars picking to the tune of "Jingle Bells" with very emotional vocals. I'd do Anything" by Simple Plan was an extraordinary power pop number, with an 80's vibe reminiscent of The Plimsouls. The vocals are sweet and intense, cunning guitar work, and precise drumming. The Bosstones blast out a firery rendition of Sugar Free." The only thing missing is a cut from Flogging Molly but hey, here's 24 songs that will leave you wanting the band's full albums! - Phil Rainone

THE BEST BANDS YOU'VE NEVER HEARD IN YOUR LIFE - 7-inch EP (More East Records, PO Box 2223, Edison, NJ 08818) When your 7-inch has a title that can be attributed to Frank Zappa, and the cover art is a photo of Paul Westerberg's shoes, you know you have something good in your hands. The Best Bands You've Never Heard In Your Life is a collection of four bands, and I was impressed with each. Mazeffect kick things off with a furious cover of Husker Du's classic "Flip Your Wig". The guys pay homage to the original, but they make the song their own, which is difficult to do with music that is so revered by a rabid fan base like that of the Huskers. The Ergs, the only band I had previously heard, offer a garage pop gem entitled "Saturday Nite Crap-O-Rama", a song that reinforces the fact that more people need to know about this band. The flipside features Grover Kent's lyrically generic love anthem "Caroline", the weakest of the four tracks here, but even this was saved by a melodic and fairly thick guitar riff. The closing effort came from Rats Eyes Retired (At 21) and their hyperactive "Nervous Breakdown", a breakneck noise fest that was the best one of the bunch. You may not have a clue as to who these bands are right now, but go find this and educate yourself my friend! Additionally, you better do so quickly, for this is limited to only 500 copies. - Rich Quinlan

(COLES) NOTES FROM THE UNDERGROUND" (Underground Operations – PO Box 13, Ajax, ON, L1S 3C2, Canada, www.undergroundoperations.com)– Four punk bands from Ontario, Canada are represented with two songs each on this meet and greet compilation. Bombs over Providence, Protest the Hero, Marilyn's Vitamins and Closet Monster all play politicized pop punk leaning towards hardcore. The bands vary slightly with the emo-ish Bombs, snotty Protest, speedy Vitamins and anthem-fueled (and most impressive) Closet Monster. On the whole though, this compilation is a great introduction to the political pop punk scene in central Canada. – Jason Schreurs

EVERY DOG WILL HAVE ITS DAY (Adeline Records, 5337 College Ave. #318 Oakland CA 94618) Who would of thought Billie Joe had his own record label? Well, he's not the sole owner-there's also Lynn Parker and Jim Thiebaud (Real Skateboards)- but he's probably the only one with any money. Surprisingly, one of the best tunes on this comp is the opening track "Ha Ha You're Dead" by Green Day, which is sure to take longtime fans back to the days when the seminal three piece actually made songs with heart. It rocks hard and got me dancing around my apartment with my fist pumping in the air. Another standout outfit is Vena Cava, who I want to call a stoner rock band because of their heavy riffs; but there is also something of a poppy edge to this tune that makes me confused as hell about their sound and happy as can be to figure them out. Then there's Enemy You, who pay homage to Screeching Weasel and Weston in the catchy rocker "Janeane Hates Herself". And one can't forget Agent 51, who start their Fun-Time-Charly, "Wrecking Ball" with some "Oh, Oh, Oh's" that belong on any of the first 3 AC/DC albums. I look forward to seeing the kind of full length releases on Adeline in the near future. – Dan Storchan

MOB ACTION AGAINST THE STATE: Collected Speeches From the Bay Area Anarchist Book Fair (Alternative Tentacles/AK Press; 2-CD) I hardly even know where to start with this. A gay/Chicana/Okie/black/Beat/English/female/Marxist/atheist take on anarchism, prisons, history, punk rock, cops, and just about everything else of concern to anyone who knows who Emma Goldman was. Highlights include Lawrence Ferlinghetti (duh), Barry Pateman's talks about problems within anarchism and between anarchists and what he calls "regular people", Elizabeth Martinez' history of Chicana anarchists (a history I'm ashamed to say I knew nothing about prior to hearing this), and, of course, the brilliant, why-haven't-you-read-his-damn-book-already Christian Parenti, speaking with levelling insight about prisons. The only real sour note is Paul Krassner's lame George W. Bush jokes at the end of the first disc. A must-have (it would make a perfect companion to Christian Parenti's book *Lockdown America*, did I mention how brilliant that guy is yet?) - Shawn Setaro

ONEIDA / LIARS - *Atheists, Reconsider* Split CD-EP (Arena Rock Recording Company, 242 Wythe Ave., Studio 6, Brooklyn, NY, 11211) Liars and Oneida are being hailed as resurrecting psychedelic rock and post-punk respectively, but this EP doesn't show either band bringing anything back to life. Instead Atheists, Reconsider is a dumfounding EP of noise and experimental stuff that should have been left on the cutting room floor. Each band covers on of the others' songs and Liars even throw in their scored version of a scene from "The Wizard of Oz." This split CD is a total waste of time for anyone not currently going ga-ga over these bands, and even those people might feel somewhat cheated. The six songs here aren't exactly the second coming of Wire/Gang of Four (Liars) or Pink Floyd (Oneida); come to think of it, they're not exactly the second coming of anything. - Jason Schreurs

PET SET RECORDS COMPILATION (Pet Set Records, PMB #204 827 Washington St., San Diego, CA 92103) This very DIY compilation includes eleven acts with varying styles and degrees of ability. The noisy anti-pop of Tourettes Lautrec kicked things off and instantly held my attention. To Pet Set's credit, no one can ever describe this company as conservative or predictable in their choice of releases. Uranus brought an ambient soundscape with a soft jazz tempo and unique samples to the table with "Cloud 9', a track matched in atmospheric beauty by Kelly Slusher's "Sing That Song". Masters of D Funk and Observatory Swivel (featuring 10.19) provided two hip-hop efforts, with the first being bouncier and less verbally aggressive then the latter. Waterfall's "Theme" was a pure garage track, lo-fidelity recording quality and bursting punk energy, which was followed by the free-form antics of Busride. This is the type of lunacy you either get and love, or find incessantly annoying. Personally, it was my favorite track of the record. The second side featured three bands, Ignatius J. Reilly, The Wizards of War and The Cuban, who all performed infectious dance tracks without the benefit, or possible hindrance (?) of song titles. The Wizards of War began with a symphonic overture before launching into a song reminiscent of early Wax Trax efforts, while The Cuban's sound featured a drum n' bass groove which separated it from the two earlier tracks. Closing with Narcotheos's "Close to Down" was a bit of a mistake, for its plodding sound seemed to lack direction. Dark in nature and thick in sound, the song did not capture the energy that dominated this compilation. Overall, Pet Set has earned a new admirer, but be forewarned: You must enter into any release from this label with a very open mind and be willing to take some chances. If that's your kind of label, enjoy the fruits of their labor. - Rich Quinlan

THE PHILADELPHIA SOUND (Chunksaah Records, PO BOX 974, New Brunswick, NJ08903) A far reaching, varied range of influences are found in the output of the four Philadelphia-based rippers featured on this four way compilation, from the angular, screeched discord of The Curse, to the distinctly Black Flag-tinged walloping of Paint It Black, the fast paced late '80s structural power of Go! For The Throat, and the searing, jagged gloom of Knives Out. As testament to a varied, eclectic, and active scene prominent in that locale, these four distinct entities prove pleasing in their own distinct manner, with Knives Out proving the most formidable in terms of searing velocity and power on their latest two neurotic and vicious anthems, a worthy follow up to their solid Deathwish debut. The inscrutable Paint It Black, fronted by ex-Lifetime/Kid Dynamite guitarist Dan Yemin, also pack a hulking punch with their own potent brand of stripped down intensity. Gone is any vestige of the layered melodic elements stressed in Yemin's last two widely celebrated projects, as Paint It Black proves his most unabashedly guttural outfit yet. G!FTT, with a hook-crammed infusion of dizzying riffs and structured shout-alongs, yield a comparatively upbeat element to this collection, while the Curse, with a fairly invigorating (albeit somewhat cliché) string of screeched, 'emotive' frenetic and loose numbers, further expand upon an already disparate roster. This is a fairly eclectic outing, and those craving a solid display of diversified chaos should certainly sample this effort. –Mike Ramek

STEPPING STONE VOL. 1: The Best Bands You Have Never Heard (The Milita Group, 7925 Warner Ave. Ste.K, Huntington Beach CA 92647) This reviews section is full of great bands you have never heard. This Cd, alas, features 15 bands that run a very narrow gamut from pop-punk (NJ's Tokyo Rose) to emo (most of the rest) to screamo. I'm guessing these are demos that someone at the Militia Group liked, but not enough to actually sign the bands to album deals. Nothing here sucks, and a few of the tracks make me want to hear more (Tokyo Rose, The Cassettes, The Readion)... but "the best bands you've never heard?" Uh.... No. - Jim Testa

WE'RE A HAPPY FAMILY – A Tribute To The Ramones (DV8/Columbia) This heavily-hyped posthumous tribute to Queens' favorite sons features a slew of mega-brand name bands. (The thought occurs that If just a couple of these multi-platinum acts had covered the Ramones back when the band was still going, Joey and Dee Dee might have gone to their final reward a little more comfortably... But that's another story.) Predictably, the bands who might be expected to have actually been fans of the Ramones tend to do the best jobs here. It's no surprise that Green Day and The Offspring both excel on their tracks (although it's disappointing that Rancid's "Sheena Is A Punk Rocker" sounds so bloodless.) U2 does okay with their "Beat On The Brat," Garbage adds electricity and sex appeal to "I Just Wanna Have Something To Do," and Kiss totally nails "Do You Remember Rock N Roll Radio." The most pleasant surprise here is folkie Pete Yorn's "I Wanna Be Your Boyfriend," which just may be the best cover on this disc. Then there's the rest, the mega-star bands whose mega egos wouldn't let them honor the Ramones' versions of the songs without overlaying their own incompatible styles: The Red Hot Chili Peppers manage to turn "Havana Affair" into a soggy remake of "Under The Bridge;" Rob Zombie slows down and ruins "Blitzkrieg Bop," Eddie Vedder transforms "I Believe In Miracles" into a banal arena-rock ballad, and Metallica (who you'd think would get it) sing a prissy, lifeless version of "53rd & 3rd" that makes it sound like it was the intersection of Hollywood & Vine. Worst track: Rooney's droopy "Here Today, Gone Tomorrow," although Marilyn Manson's sludgy, goth'd up take on "The KKK Took My Baby Away" comes close. Weirdest track: Tom Waits' whiskey-soaked interpretation of "Return of Jackie & Judy." There's a bonus track – and actually a pretty good one – of Vedder (backed by the punk band Zeke) doing the fairly obscure "Daytime Dilemma (Dangers Of Love,)" and if you keep your CD player running at the end of the disc, you'll find an uncredited hidden track (it's John Frusciante of the Chili Peppers) doing "Today Your Love, Tomorrow The World." - Jim Testa

BOOKS

SPIELS OF A MINUTEMAN - By Mike Watt (L'Oie de Cravan Books. www.cam.org/~cravan) Of all the people I've interviewed in the 21 years of Jersey Beat, few stand out like Mike Watt. Watt's not only one of the founding fathers of American DIY punk, but a truly original thinker (and no matter how punk, quite possibly the last of the Beatniks as well.) You might know his music from his records with the Minutemen, fIREHOSE, and more recent solo releases, but this book will provide an insight into the mind of this amazing man. Along with an autobiographical (and philosophical) essay by Watt, there are testimonials from Thurston Moore, rock critic Richard Meltzer, and Joe Carducci (who ran SST Records during its prime years in the 80's.) There are also complete lyrics from all of Watt's Minuteman songs and some cool artwork by Raymond Pettibone (who did a lot of album covers and posters for SST bands). And since the book is being published in Quebec, it's in English and French. Highly recommended. (If our "Letter From Prison" essay in this issue has inspired any of you to look into the "real" meaning of punk, here's a great place to start, from one of the men who helped invent many of the ideas that still fuel the DIY movement today.) – Jim Testa

VANS WARPED BOOK: Tales of Freedom and Psychotic Ambition, by Heidi Siegmund Cuda/ Photographs by Lisa Johnson/ Art Direction by Chris Gallipoli

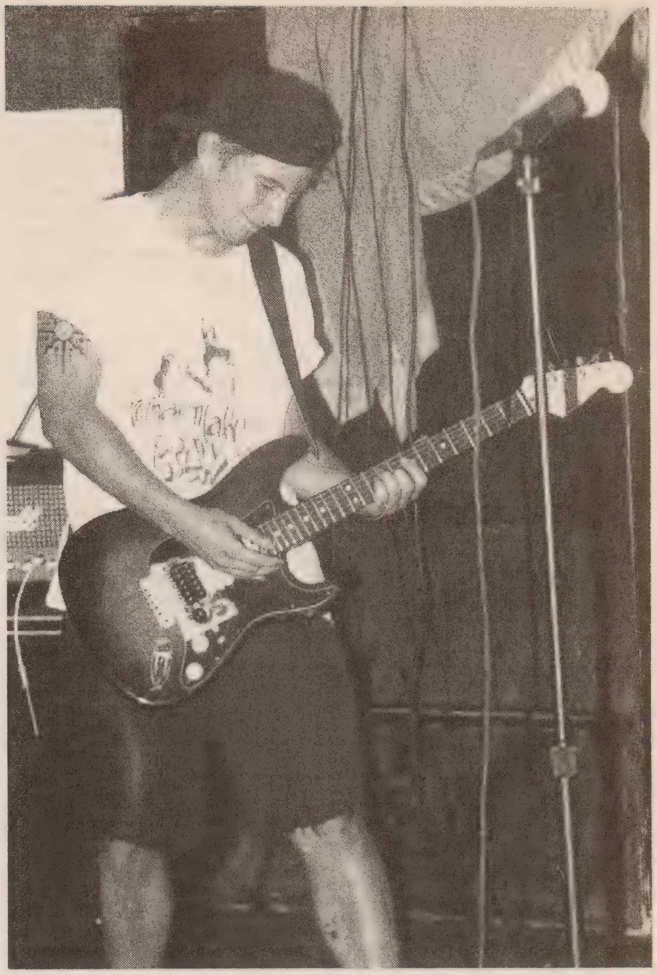
Last year ('01) on our trek to Boston to catch The Warped Tour, the crew (Frank, Steve, Tim & myself), were talking about past Tours and the bands that played. It became apparent that there were a lot more bands than we could come up with. This book fills in the blanks and than some. It takes you inside "Punk rock summer camp," with vivid stories and photos (some by the bands). It's like, "oh wow, I didn't realize that band played on the Warped Tour!"

Over the last seven years the Tour has become a rite of passage, even with anyone remotely into punk. When asked if they have been to see the Warped Tour, you'd probably get a resounding "YEAH!" or a quiet "No, my parents wouldn't let me." (Hey kids, don't forget about the "Reverse Daycare" for the adults that's been offered these last two years). Lots of fan and band photos/stories that tap into the life style of the Tour, and take you behind the scenes, giving you an interesting view of what goes on. They also have an interview with Warped Tour sponsors Steve and Kristy Van Doren on the origin of their taking over this huge traveling musical carnival. It was especially fun to read about the bands and memorabilia that we've experienced over the last two years. Having met bands like Reel Big Fish, The Bosstones, Homegrown, etc., this book is an extension of what we saw and felt. It's also a reminder of the unforgettable experience I shared with my son and daughter. -Phil Rainone

UNDER THE INFLUENCE - A Tribute to The Smith's, The Clash, and The Cure (Too Damn Hype, P.O. Box 63524, Philadelphia, PA, 19147) The cool thing about tributes is that all those connections you always suspected, all those old roots reaching into new shrubs, you hear immediately. If it's a good tribute, that is. The connections are made and here, they are genuine. That's usually the uncool thing about most tributes - some of those paying homage sound like they're just cashing a check for kissing ass. The bands here sound like they at least wanted to do worthy renditions of the songs they remade, even those handful of times where they should've left well enough alone (oh, c'mon, every tribute has at least a few like that). For UNDER THE INFLUENCE, I say thumbs all the way up to the stratosphere, possibly my all-time favorite tribute disc. Standouts include: Chimaira doing The Cure's "Fascination Street" and H20 doing The Smith's "Heaven Knows I'm Miserable Now." Buy! - Mike Chant

DVDS

AS FRIENDS RUST / STRIKE ANYWHERE – Live At Camden Underworld, London (www.musicvideodistributors.com) Another Punkervision live DVD, this time with two bands in the screamo/melodic hardcore vein. Taped with multiple cameras, slickly edited and with good stage sound, the DVD should make fans of both bands happy, although if you're not into this rather strictly-defined style of punk, I doubt anything here will win you over. The harsh stage lighting make the members of As Friends Rust glow like red ghosts through much of their set. The dreadlocked lead singer of Strike Anywhere is a dead ringer for Keith Morris, but his band provides none of the distinctiveness or anthemic themes of Morris' Circle Jerks. The Camden Underworld, where this was taped, has a small stage, with the audience practically on top of the band, so there's plenty of crowd-surfing, fist-pumping mayhem going on to liven things up. But the lack of any special features -- band interviews, lyrics, or discographies would have been nice additions at very little cost -- makes this DVD of dubious interest to anyone but --excuse the expression – hardcore fans. Jim Testa



PICK HIT: Bouncing Souls - "Do You Remember?" DVD

CBGB: PUNK FROM THE BOWERY (DVD) (www.musicvideodistributors.com) CBGB's place in rock history was cemented in the late 70's when bands like the Ramones, Blondie, and Television used the grimey Bowery bar to launch their careers (and a musical revolution.) But the story didn't stop there. After the original Punk bands moved on, CBGB became the birthplace of New York's hardcore scene; throughout the Eighties, hundreds of sweaty teenagers jammed into CB's every Sunday afternoon for ritualistic orgies of testosterone-fueled mayhem. D.C., L.A., and Boston had hardcore scenes too, but nothing compared to those Sunday CB's hardcore matinees. This DVD captures CBGB's 30th anniversary celebration, when many of those bands either reunited or simply returned to the Bowery for several nights of concerts. It's a bit off-putting at first to see bands remembered as steely, tattooed, bare-chested young men now paunchy and balding, in their thirties and forties, still playing the same songs they made famous in their youth. And it doesn't help that many of them – recorded live from CBGB's stage, without any studio enhancement - sound so much alike. "Fast, loud rules," they used to say back then; and that's what you get here. Yet bands like Agnostic Front, the Cro-Mags, Madball, Kraut, NJ's Adrenaline OD, and England's Varukers and Vibrators prove in these performances that hardcore punk is not solely the province of rowdy teenage boys. These bands still rock; 20-year old songs like Kraut's "Kill For Cash" couldn't be more relevant to today's political environment, and chestnuts like AOD's "Old People Talk Loud" are still funny. This DVD isn't so much a document of punk history as a testament to punk careerism; 30 years after Hilly Kristal first opened his doors to live music, and 20 years after most of these bands made their first mark on the world, CBGB and these musicians are still rocking. Who would'a thought? - Jim Testa

D.I.Y. OR DIE: Burn This DVD (www.musicvideodistibutors.com) This documentary by Michael W. Dean isn't a manual on how to publish a fanzine or start a band. Rather, it's a look into the very souls of a group of talented and dedicated individuals who have chosen to live as artists, on their own terms and outside the mainstream. Call it the Zen of DIY, if you will; but by any name, it's a wonderfully revealing look into a truly alternative lifestyle as embraced by not only musicians but poets, artists, writers, and photographers. For that reason, there's no one on this DVD who would qualify as "famous" by the standards of People magazine or MTV. Anyone familiar with the world of underground music, though, will recognize such articulate and well-traveled spokepersons as Ian MacKaye of Fugazi, Lydia Lunch, Mike Watt, J Mascis, Jim "Foetus" Thirlwell, circus performer Jim Rose, and photographer/filmmaker Richard Kern. The original title of the documentary, when released on video, was "D.I.Y. Or Die: How To Survive As An Independent Artist," which sums it up perfectly. With the exception of one short passage on Napster, the material hasn't become dated at all; in fact, you'll find the wisdom and insight served up here to be timeless. Whether the person speaking into the camera writes, paints, sings, draws comics, or plays guitar, the message is the same: Be yourself, be true to your art, and do it because you love it (because there probably ain't any money in it.) This DVD version (which, by the way, is deliberately not copy-protected by the manufacturer, so you can burn copies for all your friends) includes 60 minutes of bonuses: You get additional interview footage of MacKaye, Lunch, artist Liza Matlack, and punk-rock roadie Little Mike, new interviews with indie-rock mavericks like Steve Albini and Maggie Estep, mini-documentaries on the making of the video and its original release tour, and the full audio of the filmmakers' interview with Mike Watt (who lectures on the how's and why's of "jammin' econo," his slang for touring cheaply so you can turn a profit without worrying about label support.) And if you keep poking around the DVD, there are even a few semi-hidden surprises, including mildly perverse performances by Jim Rose and Dave Brockie (better known as Oderus Urungus of GWAR.) - Jim Testa

DO YOU REMEMBER? Fifteen Years Of The Bouncing Souls (www.chunksaah.com) It's a little ironic that a bunch of punk-rock slobs like the Bouncing Souls would wind up in a video documentary that's every bit as professional and compelling as Fugai's brilliant *Instrument.* The difference is that Fugazi were already committed punk-rock lifers by the time they formed. "Do You Remember" tells the Bouncing Souls story from the very beginning, when the original members met in a youth soccer league in the Jersey suburbs, long before any of them ever dreamed of being in a band. If you know anything at all about the Bouncing Souls, you'll know they represent the classic triumph of the DIY aesthetic. The band struggled, sacrificed, persevered and eventually evolved through their funk, ska, and reggae phases to become one of the most original and entertaining (and well-loved) bands in American punk rock. The documentary portion of this DVD traces the band's history through talking-head interviews with the Souls and their close-knit family of roadies, housemates, and friends (Lamar Vannoy, Johnny X, Rob Cavallo, and earth mother Kate Hiltz), through their days in New Brunswick as kings of the basement show, to the City Gardens years, their eventual migration to NYC's Lower East Sidr, their intial DIY demos to their P&D deal with BYO to their career-making signing to Epitaph. Interspersed with the interviews are bits of home video and live footage that chronicle the growth of the band. The second disc includes live footage, videos, and funny short films that the band made with friends. The DVD is called: "Do You Remember?" The answer for me is yes, and if you've been reading Jersey Beat for any length of time, you'll already know how much I admire, respect, and love this band. They have the rare gift of bringing joy to the world - one Bouncing Souls show will convince you of that -- while remaining four of the most amazing, loyal, friendly, and Punk-Rock individuals that I've ever met. – Jim Testa

ELECTRIC FRANKENSTEIN - Camden Underworld, London – 17 December 2000 (www.punkervision.net) Electric Frankenstein is not only one of the most prolific bands in the world releasing scores of albums, EP's, singles, and compilation tracks on dozens of different independent labels -- but also a throwback to a time when punk bands didn't have to look like male models or play radio-friendly pop songs to win fans. This 2000 concert video provides an unflinching look at these exquisitely homely mooks, as they bash through a sweaty set of their uncompromisingly raunchy rock 'n' roll in front of a screaming, fist-throwing throng of rabid followers. Maybe EF haven't left behind a signature song that's entered the rock vernacular yet – their own "Kick Out The Jams," "Ace Of Spades," or "God Save The Queen" – but in their unwavering dedication to fusing all styles of rock and roll, from metal to punk to Elvis to Danzig, they capture and recreate what was great about the MC5, Motorhead, and the Sex Pistols in a style that's still distinctly their own. This DVD was stitched together from several different camera angles -- side stage, back of the room, up close -- with excellent sound, and also includes a wide-ranging interview with guitarist Sal Canzonieri, one of rock 'n' roll's most eloquent spokesmen. Jim Testa

FRIENDS FOREVER: A Documentary Film by Ben Wolfinsohn (www.plexifilm.com) Somewhere between the absurdist satire of *This Is Spinal Tap* and the cinema verite' of *Another State Of Mind, Friends Forever* documents the neverending journey of two guys name Nate and Josh, who travel around the country performing in their van. They call themselves a band and vow that they're on a mission to save rock 'n' roll, but the duo never steps inside a club or hall; instead, they set up in parking lots or on the street outside other concerts and make the most ungodly racket - just drums, guitar, lights, and smoke. In Las Vegas, a well-meaning casino stagehand suggests the pair concentrate more on their music and less on the gimmicks. But the advice falls on deaf ears; Josh and Nate - like Bill & Ted before them -- live life as an excellent adventure that answers to no known standards. Filmmaker Ben Wolfinsohn captures the dynamic duo's mishaps (they get shut down far more often than they ever get to finish a performance, and drive endless miles from show to show) with the deadpan objectivity of a National Geographic nature special. Never spoken, but always obvious, is the sad fact that the absurdist, self-defeating odyssey of these two losers really isn't all that far removed from the plight of any indie-rock band that chooses to create outside the mainstream. Alternately sad and laugh-out-loud funny, *Friends Forever* succeeds not only as a compelling documentary about two extraordinary individuals, but as a metaphor for the DIY experience itself. – Jim Testa

GG ALLIN - Alive & Pissed 1988 (www.musicvideodistributors.com) The late GG Allin's closest brush with the mainstream came whenever some television shockmeister like Morton Downey Jr. would do an "expose" on his act, which in later years often included defecating on stage and bloody melees with his audience. But to a sizable underground cult, GG Allin was something of an icon, who unapologetically took rock's darkest side to its extremes. Like Elvis, Allin is now remembered as the bloated, drug-addled psychotic of his last years, but this DVD - which chronicles a performance and some backstage shenanigans at San Francisco's Covered Wagon in November, 1988 - captures Allin in his prime, when he could still stand upright and sing (well.... scream) through an entire set. For most of the set, the still-slim Allin stalks the stage in nothing but a black jockstrap, and you have to give the man credit for being ahead of his time; in 1988, the whole Seattle/Sub-Pop scene was still in its infancy, but GG's music was nothing if not grunge - dark, sick, sludgy heavy-metal, peppered with scatological references and profanity. The band - which included filmmaker Richard Kern on guitar - manages to stay in tune and on time for a fair part of the set, and while the music and performances won't exactly make you forget the Sex Pistols, the video and audio quality are very good (especially compared to the scores of dark, grainy, out-of-focus GG bootleg videos that circulate throughout the punk underground to this day.) The set ends with a fist fight (nothing unusual for GG Allin and, in fact, pretty mild compared to many of his shows;) keep your eyes peeled on the crowd when the lights go up at the end of the set and you can spot Alternative Tentacles' Jello Biafra and NoFX's Fat Mike huddled together. The DVD includes scenes of the band at soundcheck, Allin cavorting backstage with some groupies, and (for anyone who might already have the VHS version of this release,) bonus footage of Aiiin and his last band, The Murder Junkies. For anyone curious about the legend that GG Allin left behind - or for fans who only experienced the sad, twisted wreck of a man that degraded himself in public at the end of his career - "Alive & Pissed 1988" provides a clue as to what all the fuss was about. Whether he was truly a menace to society - as he was often billed - or simply a sorry spectacle of drug abuse and wanton excess remains your call. - Jim Testa

PUNK O RAMA - The Videos Vol. 1 (Epitaph) Two hours and ten minutes of some of the best music that is "punker than you" (I stole that line Jim Testa, he comes up with a good one now and then!) Twenty-two songs that combine old school (NOFX, Rancid, Descendents, etc.) with newer bands that recently joined the label (Hot Water Music, Millencolin, The Bouncing Souls, etc.). Speaking of the Souls, they'll have their own DVD of the history of the band in '03. Besides some kick- ass videos (this definitely isn't MTV), the bonus features include "The Epitaph Story," which would make a cool, honest blueprint for anyone wanting to start their own DIY band or label. They also include live performances of The Bouncing Souls and Bad Religion, both of which are worth the price of admission alone. Along with Pennywise and Dropkick Murphys (great videos), they include the Offspring, ("Come Out and Play"). According to Epitaphs owner Brett, The Offspring are the band that put the label on the map, selling 9 million copies worldwide. - Phil Rainone

THE BLOOD BROTHERS – *Jungle Rules Live* (Artist Direct Records) Do you remember when people had to know who you were before you put out a DVD? Now it's just another marketing tool. So meet the Blood Brothers, an underground avant-hardcore act (their label, not mine) from Seattle clawing its way into the mainstream with the new "screamo" sound (again, their label, not mine.) Take equal parts Fugazi and MC5. Now add five skinny guys with cool haircuts and tight t-shirts. Two of them play frontman, screaming their lungs out over hyperspeed garage-rock. It's a one-dimensional adrenaline orgy (anyone remember Digital Hardcore?) but if you're into youthful testosterone-fueled screaming, it'll give you a charge. Taken in small doses, it's even bracing; although the fairly short (11 song) set captured on this DVD goes on a bit too long for me. (Maybe I'm just getting old; I'm sure the Ramones struck people the same way back in 1977.) There's also a "bonus" photo gallery, a discography (which, given that the band only has four releases out, doesn't seem all that vital,) and three audio tracks (all available elsewhere.) The video and sound quality are excellent, three of the guys wind up shirtless, and everybody on screen gets really sweaty. Unlike Craig Nicholls of the Vines, though (who really does looks deranged,) I have to say that despite what a lot of other critics are drooling, all the frenzy here just looks like a good act. -- Jim Testa

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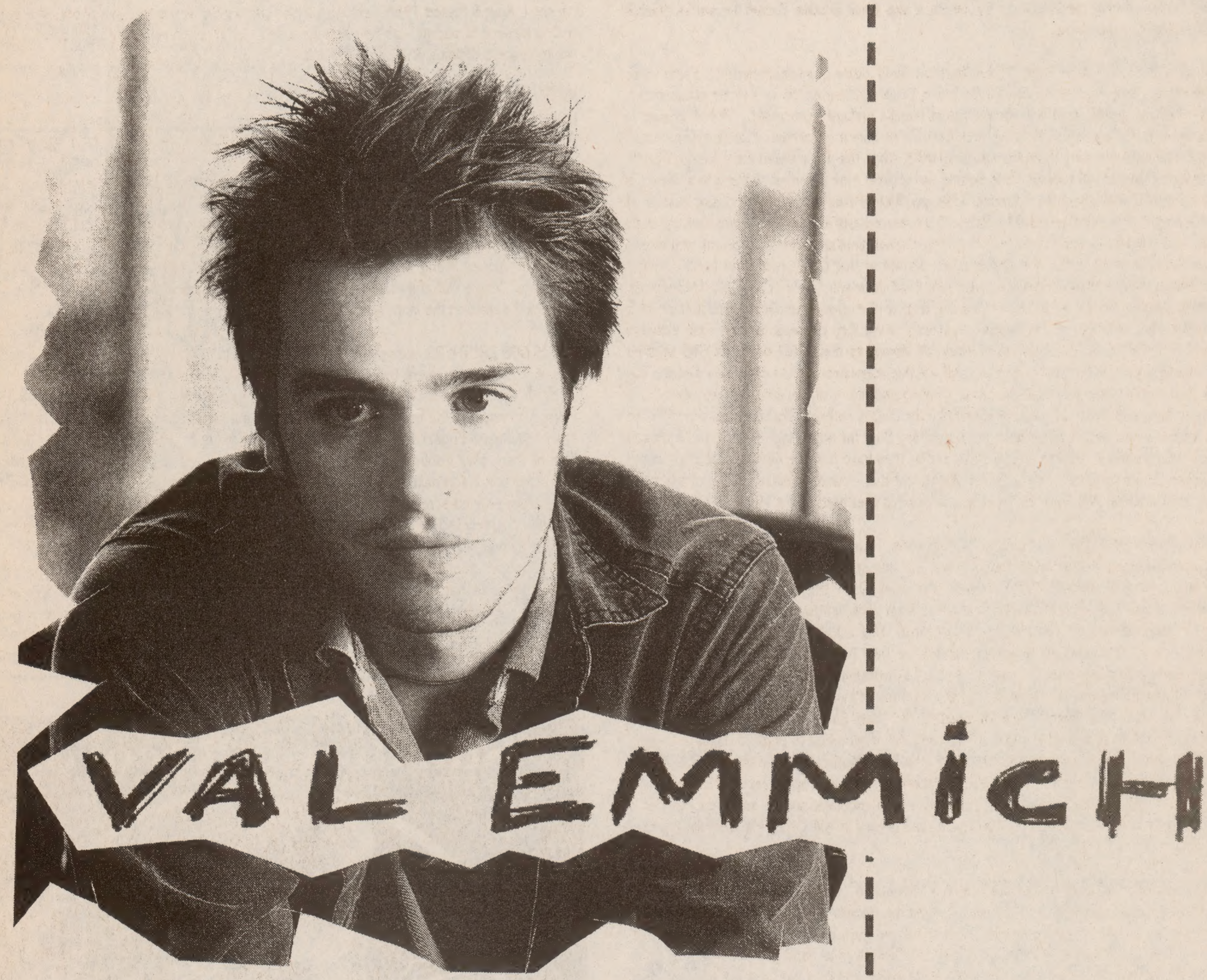
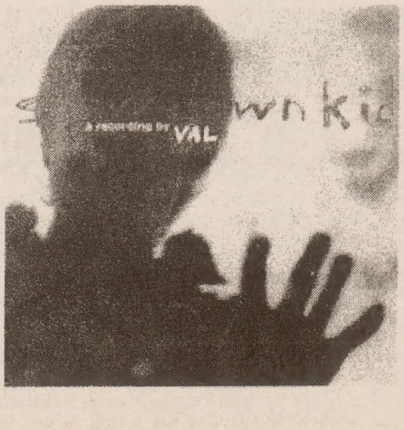


IN STORES NOW

"As one of the most visible of New Jersey's new generation of indie musicians, as well as a partner with Andy Gesner in Artist Amplification, Val Emmich has a lot more than just his own career resting on his shoulders. Judging by this promising debut, this kid isn't about to slow down." – Jim Testa, Jersey Beat

"One minute Val Emmich is a thoughtful singer-songwriter-guitarist with a Red House Painterly mope to his emotive voice, surging into falsetto then dropping back again. The next he's gone almost Marshall Crenshaw with the early-rock-meets-Beatles "Rat Race"; while later he'll veer into grunge with the thrashy 'Unstable' and scream all over the place." - Alternative Press



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ALARM #13 (PO Box 200069, Boston MA 02120, $5) It says inside the zine that it's available for $3 ppd but the cover price is $4.95, which is a tad confusing. But the zine is worth $5 for the stylish offset printing (no greasy newsprint getting yr fingers all grimey like Jersey Beat!,) and the well done features. I always like it when another zine interviews a bunch of my favorite bands, and this issue of Alarm is full of them -- Bad Religion, Girls Against Boys, Dag Nasty, Bouncing Souls, Piebald, and lots more. A good read and good looking too.

AQUATULLE #5 (322 Bleeker St. #k15, NYC 10014, $4) "A journey into yesterday's pop culture madness," reads the sub-title. Issue 5 pretty much sticks with the 70's – Joey Ramone remembered, Andy Summers of the Police, Roberta Bayley (the resident photographer of PUNK magazine,) David Sylvain, the Damned, the Go Gos (I guess we're in the Eighties now,) Martha & The Muffins (remember them? I do!) and lots more. Cheeky retro fun that doesn't take itself too seriously.

THE BIG TAKEOVER #51 (249 Eldridge St. #14, NYC 10002 $5) Just about the best written zine on the planet, for anyone who cares about more than just emo and hardcore anyway. #51 includes interviews with Paul Westerberg, Wire, Swervedriver's Adam Franklin, Mike Ness, Mike Watt, Interpol, Hot Hot Heat, and oh, about 60 other people that you'd probably kill for a chance to sit down and talk with, plus a skazillion well-written reviews. The first thing I do with a new Big Takeover is read Jack Rabid's live reviews and find out about all the cool shows I missed, then I park the zine in the john and read it page by page until I get all the way through it (which usually takes a few weeks, there's so much to read in here.)

BURNT ZINE #5 (Franco Ortega, PO Box 5754, Parsippany NJ 07054, $1) Did you now that NJ had the first Indian Reservation, the first American brewery, the first commercial radio station, the tallest water tower in the world, and the most number of diners of any state? Cool, huh? Besides a page of NJ facts, this issue has several different autobiographical essays and rants that deal with everything from technology to racism, a piece on the politics of porn and an interview with a porn actress, and lots of reviews.

CARBON 14 #22 (PO Box 29247, Philadelphia PA 19125, $6) Six bucks is a lot for a fanzine but Carbon 14 gives you your money's worth. It's a thick zine printed on glossy paper, with excellent production and layouts – and the writing, every issue, is just outstanding. This issue includes looks at Queens Of The Stone Age, Celibate Rifles, and, oh, so much more. What other zine would give you an interview with Bomp zine editor (and indie-rock forefather) Greg Shaw right next to a history of Mexican masked lucha libre wrestling? Comes with a 7-inch EP featuring Dead Moon, Hellside Stranglers, the Earaches, and the Oblivion Seekers.

CHIN MUSIC #5 -- The New York Issue (www.girlyhead.com/ChinMusic.html) Mike Piazza! Barry Zito! Johnny Ramone on baseball! A look inside the Little League World Series. Pre-punk NYC noise-rockers Suicide. Dave Kingman, Man or Myth? You get the idea, equal parts baseball and punk rock.

THE CIA MAKES SCIENCE FICTION UNEXCITING #1 (Microcosm, PO Box 14332, Portland OR 97293, $1) Okay, conspiracy buffs, here's a mini comic book that goes into great detail about the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr (and the possible involvement of US Cointelpro, FBI, and CIA agents.) It's printed up to look like one of those cuckoo Christian screeds that people hand you on the subway, which I think is the point.

DAGGER #31 (Tim Hinely, PO Box 820102, Portland OR 97282, $3.50) Tim has been doing Dagger for 15 years and took the zine with him when he relocated to Portland after many years in California. Things still look pretty much the same, though -- newsprint zine, more text than photos, and good interview skills (Interpol, Plush, Travoltas, lots more) plus lots of reviews and the editors' Desert Island Discs.

FAT CITY #5 (PO Box 120196, Boston MA 02112, $4.50) This zine is a little pricey but it's published on glossy magazine paper with a full-color cover and looks every bit as pro as Magnet, but still keeps that DIY fanzine flavor. Stories include an update on former Dropkick Murphys frontman Mike McColgan, the Dictators, Marky Ramone, the Warped Tour, Slapshot, Captain Sensible, reviews, and lots of photos. Nice job.

GENETIC DISORDER #16 (PO Box 15237, San Diego CA 92175, $4) Editor Larry takes some high-school girl to her prom, there's a loser's guide to SanDiego, Larry grows a mustache and tries to pick up chicks, a guide to skull imagery in punk rock... this zine just goes every which way, but go with it, you'll enjoy the ride.

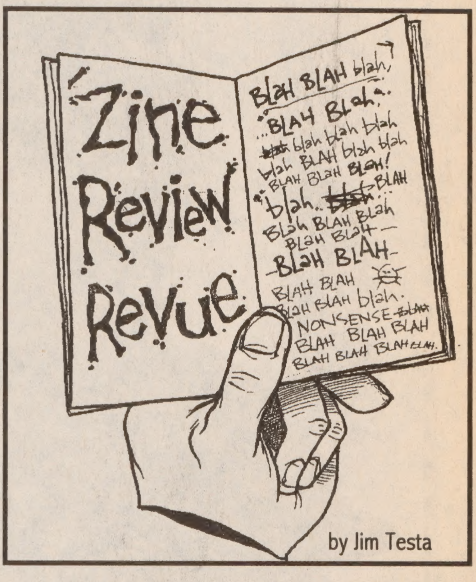
GO METRIC #16 (15A S. Bedford Rd., Pound Ridge NY 10576, $2) Always lots of good ideas in this zine, starting with a chart that compares Ben Weasel to Yes (!), a chat with documentarian Russ Forster (he did an awesome doc on the 8-track underworld) on his new film, a documentary on cover bands; "the 10 greatest non-American, non-British rock bands of all time -- he forgot The Ex and the Doughboys!); Godzilla, the Spiderman movie, and all manner of pop culture examined through the eyes of a collection of literate and obsessive geeks. Lots of fun.

LEFT OF THE DIAL #4 (1438 W. Alabama #4, Houston TX 77006, $4) An earnest and well-written zine that understands that understanding and appreciating punk's past is a vital component of its future. That philosophy is made manifest in the editor's opening editorial, where he complains of touring through Montreal and not being able to find any Canadian hardcore records by his favorite Canadian bands. The interviews segue back and forth between punkrock legends and new kids on the block, including the Hot Snakes, John Stabb, Guided By Voices, Les Savy Fav, Lagwagon, Reggie & The Full Effect, Wayne Kramer, and a long interview with Al Quint on his 20 years doing Suburban Voice zine. Yowza. Great zine that will hopefully reach a lot of kids who think Green Day invented punk-rock in 1994.

THE NEW SCHEME #7 (PO Box 19873, Boulder CO 80308, $2) Dillinger Four, Shadows Fall, a story on the end of DeSoto Records, Matt Pond PA, Latterman and lots more (reviews, good photos, etc). There's generally an emo/hardcore focus here but what the New Scheme covers, it covers well.

PICK YOUR POISON #1, 2, and 3 ((Nate Gangelhoff, PO Box 8995, Minneapolis MN 55408, $1 each) This is basically the editor's autobiography, told as short stories about growing up as a typical fucked-up suburban kid. A lot of these stories deal with the author's buddy, who steers him into recreational drug use (everything from pot to paint thinner), among other misadventures. Funny, personal, and engrossing. If Jean Shepherd had been born in the 80's, this is what his work might have been like.

QUICKDUMMIES #15 (16810 Bellaire Dr. New Orleans LA 70124, $3) Man, if you think Jersey Beat is text-heavy, check out this baby. But it's okay, there's lots to read but it's all worthwhile. Against Me, Vitamin X, Dead Alive Records, NJ's Fairmont, lots of reviews, a gallery of poster art, several pages of band photos, and lots of reviews.



by Jim Testa

STARDUMB PunkRockZine #6 (PO Box 21145, 3001 AC Rotterdam, The Netherlands) Stardumb is a punk label that also produces this zine and re-releases a lot of American pop-punk for European audiences. The half-size zine looks pretty much like 2/3 of the American zines that started flooding the scene back in the early 90's, when laser photocopiers first became available. These guys love punk rock so much that you just have to love them back -- this issue includes interviews with Toys That Kill, the Mallrats, Boris The Sprinkler, and a look at Japanese monster-flick auteur Sogo Ishi.

STOLEN SHARPIE REVOLUTION #1 (Alex Wrakk, PO Box 14332, Portland OR 14332 $3) This is a mini-How To Guide for all you would-be DIY'ers. It includes tips on putting together and copying a fanzine, indie promotion, distribution, mail crafts, and tips on starting an indie label. There are ideas in here that even I didn't know (after doing this 20 years!). Kids, get yourself a copy of this and then get started!

TIGHT PANTS #9 / SNAKE PIT #27 (Maddy, 296A Nassau Ave #3L, Bklyn NY 11222, $1) A joint zine although it's a pretty slight half-sized, Xeroxed affair, mostly silly (that's Maddy's word, not mine) comic strips drawn by Maddy of Tight Pants and Ben of Snake Pit. Ben throws in a page where he rants and lists his favorite records of 2002.

TIGHT PANTS #9 (Maddy, 296A Nassau Ave #3L, Bklyn NY 11222, $2) A much more substantial affair than #9, celebrating Maddy's move to NYC and admission to grad school. This issue has lots of little rants and stories about Maddy's life and observations, an ongoing celebration of boys in pants, pop-punk hero trading cards, and of course lots of her silly drawings. If you're into the perzine thing, Tight Pants is always worth checking out.

TOXIC FLYER #33 (Billy Whitfield, PO Box 39158, Baltimore MD 21212 $3) Toxic Flyer is the last fanzine around that looks like it's all pecked out on a typewriter, than shrunk down on a photocopier, pasted up and then printed on greasy newsprint. It's unapologetically old-school look brings us a bevy of interviews with a wide range of bands, including The Line, The Chicken Hawks, Lower Class Brats, The Forgotten, The Distillers, a photo gallery of the Trash Brats, and lots more.

WONKAVISION #20 (PO Box 63642, Philadelphia PA 19147, $3 or 5 issues for $10) Editor Justin has relocated to Philadelphia and starts out with a bang, with a tough feature story on how the city government there strangles the local all-ages subculture. There's also the story of the Dead Kennedy's battle over control of their music, a look back at Dischord and BYO's 20 years, famous punks relive their dodgeball experiences in high school, and interviews with Atmosphere, The Locust, Beta Band, Good Riddance, lots of reviews, good opinion columns, and lots more. This issue comes with a 22 song compilation CD full of yummy punk stuff, from pop to emo to hardcore. Subscribe, dammit, it's good!

YOU IDIOT #1 (Nate Gangelhoff, PO Box 8995, Minneapolis MN 55408, $2) "The magazine the Cool Kids read," it says on the cover. And, I might add, the magazine that smart-ass kids put out. Funny, cheeky sarcasm drips from every page, whether the topic is religious video games or Satanism embedded in Journey albums, or the new science of Cat Astrology, or the sad tale of Nick Carter's fall from teen-idoldom. Note to pundits: Satire is not dead.

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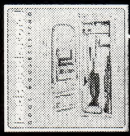

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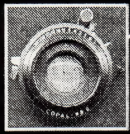

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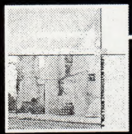

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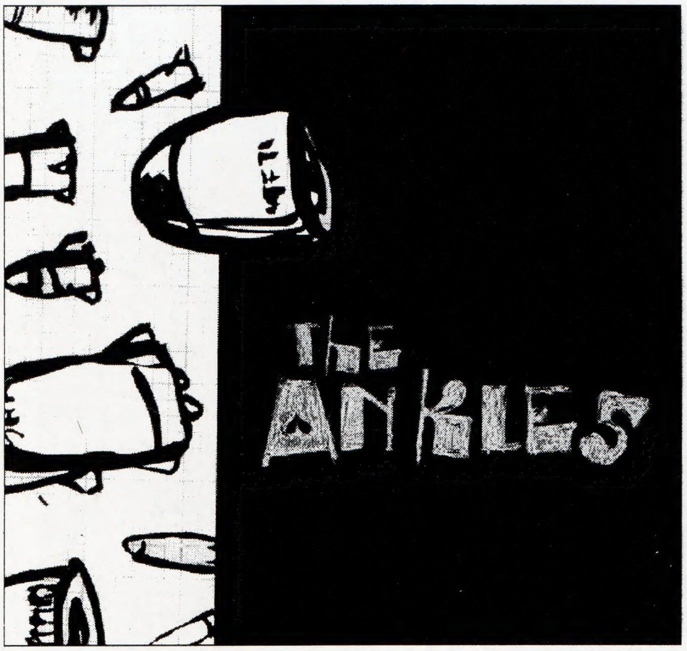

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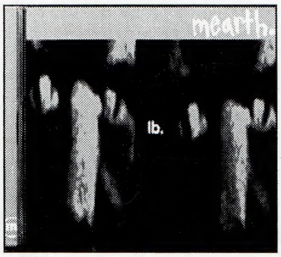

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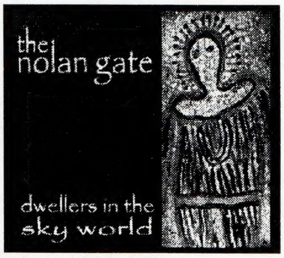
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